

**Perceived Organisational Reputation in South Africa's Public Sector:  
Employees' Narrative Accounts**

by

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored employees' perceived organisational reputation at the City of Johannesburg. Perceived organisational reputation refers to how employees believe others outside the organisation view them because of their association with their organisation. A positive perceived organisational reputation is a powerful indicator of the strength of employees' identification with their organisation. Furthermore, employees are the bedrock of organisational reputations, and are critical to their sustained success.

Ostensibly, given South Africa's tumultuous public sector legacy, democratic transition issues, and the numerous challenges that it currently faces, employees' perceived organisational reputation, and hence organisational identification with their employer, has potentially been compromised. The aim of this study was to elucidate South African public sector employees' subjective experiences and perceptions of their organisational reputation – the 'perceived organisational reputation'. This was done in order to determine whether there were any gaps that needed to be addressed in this regard so as to cultivate and sustain their roles as credible custodians and lodestars of their public sector reputation.

Fifteen participants from the City of Johannesburg, from both support services and customer-interfacing departments, participated in in-depth, narrative interviews. These were analysed using the Voice-Centred Relational Method, originally developed by Brown, Gilligan and their colleagues (Brown, Dacin, Pratt & Whetten, 1991; Brown & Gilligan, 1991). The participants were invited to relate a narrative of a time when they were involved in an incident that made them feel like the reputation of their organisation was under threat.

The participants expressed a very negative perceived organisational reputation, which had consequences for their organisational identification, personal identities and self-esteem. They relayed a number of troubling reasons for this, including a perceived leadership void, and perceived corruption and unethical practices that had taken hold of the City of Johannesburg. Furthermore, employees' negative perceived organisational reputation resulted in 'conflicted selves' at the City, and they therefore struggled with their connection to the City, due to factors like feeling 'silenced' in the organisation; experiencing judgment from their social circles because of their organisational affiliation; and battling to traverse the complex boundary between being the community and serving the community. However, these threats to their organisational identification were tempered by the enduring pride that the participants continued to experience in spite of the organisational obstacles they encountered, and a deep sense of hope that bound them to being part of South Africa's progress as public sector employees.

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*For my mother, Rahat, who always encouraged me to be me.*

## CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore public sector employees' perceived organisational reputation, and how employees believe others outside the organisation view them because of their association with their organisation. What makes perceived organisational reputation powerful is the fact that employees are at the very heart of its conceptualisation. This study argues that employees are the bedrock of organisational reputations (Dowling & Moran, 2012; Gray & Balmer, 1998; Helm, 2011; Shamma & Hassan, 2009) and are central to both organisational identity (what employees perceive, feel, and think about their organisation); and organisational image (what employees deliberately project about their organisation to influence how others think about their organisation), thereby influencing organisational reputation (outsider perceptions) significantly.

In organisations, there exists a complex inside-outside dynamic that characterises the relationship between employees and customers, with each shaping the perceptions of the other, either positively or negatively, to create the reputation of an organisation. This reciprocity exists amongst organisational identity, organisational image and organisational reputation, and is distinctly manifested in perceived organisational reputation (Brown et al., 2006; Davies, Chun, da Silva & Roper, 2004; Pruzan, 2001; Whetten & Mackey, 2002). Hence employees shape outsiders' perceptions, but are concurrently *shaped by* outsiders' perceptions. It is within this reciprocity that their sense of organisational identification is either strengthened or weakened.

Employees who belong to successful and highly regarded organisations experience a strong sense of organisational identification, augmented by elevated levels of pride and self-esteem (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994; Helm, 2011). However, the opposite also holds true as employees who perceive that they are part of a poorly regarded

organisation experience disengagement from the organisation (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Dutton et al., 1994; Helm, 2011).

Perceived organisational reputation is a critical concept that requires study in South Africa's public sector given the 'loaded' legacy and democratic transition issues it faces. South Africa's current political woes have brought reputational issues starkly to the fore. During the advent of democracy, the new democratically-elected government in South Africa failed to pay adequate attention to the deep complexities of the apartheid-infected public administration that it inherited, and adopted a short-term orientation that has resulted in devastating consequences to its reputation (Kroukamp, 2002; Mpehle, 2012; Nengwekhulu, 2009; Theletsane, 2013). Poor service delivery by local government (du Plessis, 2008; Koma, 2010; Kroukamp, 2008); a skills deficit in the public sector (Chelechele, 2009; Franks, 2015; Kroukamp, 2002); and the malignancy of corruption that has plagued the country (Franks, 2015; Kroukamp, 2008; Sindane, 2009) continue to ravage government's reputation in South Africa. Furthermore, current political turmoil in the country, with allegations of 'state capture' and the like, have destroyed public trust.

As employees are the bedrock of organisational reputations, they have a vital role to play in taking South Africa into the future by enabling the government to deliver on its transformative and developmental agenda (National Planning Commission, 2012). However, given the tumult explained above, ostensibly, their perceived organisational reputation must be very negative, consequently affecting their sense of connectedness to, and identification with, their organisation. The other significant issue is that the reciprocity of reputation is jolted into action, where these negative feelings and perceptions permeate the boundaries of the organisation, and

move into the public domain, influencing negative perceptions there and mobilising a cycle of negativity that both characterises and sustains a poor organisational reputation.

## **1.1 Research Problem and Questions**

The general aim of this study was to elucidate South African public sector employees' subjective experiences and perceptions of their organisational reputation – the 'perceived organisational reputation'. It is vital to understand where these employees stand on their perceived organisational reputation in order to determine whether there are any gaps that need to be addressed in this regard. Addressing such gaps could cultivate and sustain their roles as credible custodians of their public sector reputation.

The specific research questions posed in this study are as follows:

- What are the emerging and recurring themes across narratives in public sector employees' accounts of their perceived organisational reputation?
- What are the specific and unique stories that emerge from public sector employees' accounts of their perceived organisational reputation as the 'voices' within each narrative are explored?
- How has public sector employees' perceived organisational reputation shaped their organisational identification?

## **1.2 Justification for the Research**

The reputation of South Africa's public sector hinges on its employees. Therefore, it is important to examine employees' impressions of how others view their organisation. These viewpoints may signal a gap between where employees are and where they need to be in their commitment to playing the crucial transformative and developmental role that South Africa



requires. Perceived organisational reputation has never before been studied in South Africa's public sector, or in the private sector either. The need for this study is amplified by the infancy of the research on the reputation in the public sector in general, and the fact that even very rudimentary academic work on perceived organisational reputation in the public sector has not really commenced. This study therefore initiates research on a concept that is significant in optimising the performance of the public sector in South Africa.

### **1.3 Methodology**

Studies of perceived organisational reputation have been dominated by a Social Identity Theory (SIT) framework (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007), and to a lesser degree, by a Stakeholder Theory framework (Carmeli, Gilat & Weisberg, 2006; Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Driscoll & Crombie, 2001). This study argues that both are ill-equipped to address the dynamism and fluidity that a narrative, dialogical conception of perceived organisational reputation harnesses. Bakhtin's Theory of the Dialogical Self is therefore utilised to achieve this aim. To date, there have been *no* studies on perceived organisational reputation, globally or locally, using a narrative methodology in either the public or private sectors.

In this study, the data was collected using a semi-structured interview format and analysed using the 'listening' procedures of the Voice-Centred Relational Method. This method was originally developed by Brown, Gilligan and their colleagues (Brown, Dacin, Pratt & Whetton, 1991; Brown & Gilligan, 1991) to study women's narratives of moral conflict. The Voice-Centred Relational Method is aligned with a dialogue-based conception of self. The method specifically emphasises polyphony; voice; and the inherently social, boundless nature of the self, as advocated by Bakhtin (Hermans, 2001; Mkhize, 2003). Multiple readings of the

interview transcripts allow the researcher to tune into the polyphonic voice and the multi-layered narratives of each participant to enable a holistic understanding of the participants' expressed experiences.

## 1.4 Definition of Key Terms

This section introduces and defines the key concepts used in this study. This is only a cursory glance at these concepts, however, a full understanding of the terms will unfold as the study is further contextualised.

- *Organisational identity*: This term refers to what employees perceive, feel and think about their organisation.
- *Organisational image*: This study defines an organisational image as a business resource, and as what employees intentionally project about their organisation to influence how others think about it.
- *Organisational reputation*: This term refers to outside stakeholders' perceptions of an organisation.
- *Perceived organisational reputation*: This term refers to how employees believe others outside the organisation view them because of their association with their organisation.
- *Public sector*: This sector encompasses government-owned organisations and government-provided services.
- *Private sector*: This sector encompasses for-profit companies that are owned by individuals, and not government.
- *South Africa*: Officially known as The Republic of South Africa (RSA), this is the southernmost country in Africa.

- *Dialogism*: ‘Dialogism’ emanated from the writings of literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, who countered the notion of self-contained, isolated individuality (Hermans, 2001; Mkhize, 2003). Bakhtin posited that meaning and knowledge emerges from dialogical, communicative processes, and from the dynamic interdependence of actors located in space, time and context (Grossen & Orvig, 2011; Mkhize, 2003).
- *Interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology*: It is impossible to do justice to the vast and complex landscape that is interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology. However, in a nutshell, it draws upon the writings of Hans-Georg Gadamer, who postulated a philosophy that moved beyond a positivist scientific paradigm and its associated methodologies. Within an interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology, rather than being fixated on the methods and procedures for creating understanding, the *process* of understanding and the exploration of knowledge is revered (Annells, 1996; Dowling, 2004; Moran, 2000). Language, according to Gadamer, is absolutely essential for the process of understanding, and Gadamer’s idea of ‘linguisticity’ or *Sprachlichkeit*, means that humans encounter the world and live in it through language (Annells, 1996; Dowling, 2004; Moran, 2000).

## 1.5 Delimitations

The participants were sourced from one local government entity, the City of Johannesburg, hence it is not possible to generalise the findings to other local government entities or to the provincial or national government at this stage. It is methodologically prudent to await further research on the perceived organisational reputation across government tiers. This would provide a robust assessment of the findings of this study across government in South Africa.

## **1.6 Outline of the Thesis**

This thesis consists of eight chapters. The present chapter introduces the background and scope of the study. Chapter 2 presents the corporate reputation terrain and its composite concepts of identity, image, and reputation. The dynamic interrelatedness and reciprocity amongst these three concepts that is manifested in perceived organisational reputation is also discussed. Definitional ambiguities with regard to these specific terms are further clarified in this chapter. This chapter also presents the notion that the greatest reputational leverage for organisations can be achieved through employees as they are the bedrock of organisational reputations. It also positions a positive perceived organisational reputation as a critical construct in ensuring employees' strong organisational identification.

Chapter 3 applies the corporate reputation discourse in the public sector, and emphasises how important an awareness of the power of a strong public sector reputation is, given the scarcity of academic literature on the subject. The unique challenges and complexities in the public sector, globally, are also brought to the fore. South Africa's very unique public sector legacy, which is influenced significantly by the history of apartheid in South Africa, and the challenges it has encountered in its democratic transition process, is also explicated. Current socio-political ills that compromise the road to progress and government's reputation are also covered. It is argued that the South African government's achievement of its transformative and developmental goals is highly dependent on its employees, as they are the bedrock of its reputation. However, given the public's negative perceptions thereof, it is suggested that employees' perceived organisational reputation is potentially very negative, thereby significantly and negatively impacting their organisational identification with their employer.

Chapter 4 provides the theoretical underpinnings of the research and illustrates how Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Stakeholder Theory are useful lenses through which perceived organisational reputation can be looked at. However, these theories fail to harness the dynamism and fluidity that a narrative, dialogical conception of perceived organisational reputation enables. Bakhtin's Theory of the Dialogical Self is therefore utilised to achieve this aim.

Chapter 5 presents an overview of the methodological considerations reflected on in this study. The ontological and epistemological foundations of the study are covered, as well as the relevance of an interpretive, hermeneutic, phenomenological approach. This chapter also positions the narrative frame in the foreground, which resonates strongly with Bakhtin's dialogism, and the Voice-Centred Relational Method, which were employed in this study. It is argued that Likert scales that have typically been used to study perceived organisational reputation are 'one-dimensional' and inappropriate to study the inherent reciprocity of reputation created by dialogical selves. The Voice-Centred Relational Method is, therefore, more appropriate to capture the highly situational meaning systems that are created. The application of this method is then presented, followed by a discussion on reliability and validity in qualitative research, and finally an overview of the ethical considerations in this study.

The results are then presented and discussed in Chapter 6 and 7. Conclusions and the implications of the research are provided in Chapter 8. Recommendations are also made for future research to be conducted on perceived organisational reputation in the public sector using a dialogical theoretical framework. This is important as it concretises our understanding of the challenges and opportunities that the construct provides for employees' enhanced organisational identification. Furthermore, recommendations are made for reigniting the discourse on *Ubuntu* leadership principles in government.

## **1.7 Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter has introduced the background to the research on perceived organisational reputation in the public sector in South Africa. The public sector's reputation in South Africa depends on its employees' connectedness to its transformative and developmental goals. Hence, it is critical to establish what public sector employees' perceived organisational reputation is. An interpretive, hermeneutic, phenomenological approach positions the narrative frame in the foreground of this research for it to synergistically create multi-voiced insights emanating from Bakhtin's conception of the dialogical self and the Voice-Centred Relational Method used in this study. In so doing, a full appreciation of the reciprocity of reputation is created, which is a concept that is intrinsic to this study.

## CHAPTER 2—THE RECIPROCITY OF REPUTATION

The aim of this chapter is to position corporate identity, corporate image and corporate reputation conceptually, and to show the dynamic interplay amongst them. The idea of corporate identity, image and reputation being inextricably bound is brought to the fore, and it is argued that while all stakeholder groups have a vital role to play in the development and maintenance of corporate reputations, employees are at its very core. The dynamism amongst the concepts is given further impetus in using the concept of ‘perceived corporate reputation’. This refers to how employees believe others outside the organisation view them because of their association with the organisation, and how their feelings of identification with their workplace are consequently impacted, either positively or negatively. When outsiders view the organisation positively, organisational identification and commitment is bolstered, but the opposite is also true – negative outsider perceptions of their organisation can cause employees to experience organisational disassociation.

### **2.1 Corporate Reputation**

Corporate reputation has been a key resource throughout modern-day business history and has long been venerated as a valuable, intangible asset (Scott & Walsham, 2005). There is general consensus amongst academics and practitioners alike that a strong corporate reputation improves the functioning and profitability of organisations (Caruana, 1997; Cravens, Oliver & Ramamoorti, 2003; Dowling, 2006b; Highhouse, Broadfoot, Yugo & Devendorf, 2009; Scott & Walsham, 2005). Ang and Wight’s (2009) analysis of data from Fortune Magazine’s annual survey of corporate reputation demonstrates a strong relationship between reputation and company performance, and they further espouse the idea that strong performance is essential to

building and maintaining a strong reputation. This reciprocal relationship between company performance and reputation is complemented by Roberts and Dowling (2002) who discovered, after completing their own analysis of Fortune Magazine's survey participants, that companies with strong reputations are better equipped to sustain superior profit results over time.

Helm's (2007) description of corporate reputation as being "...one of the most complex and auspicious assets of a company" (p. 238-239) is fitting when one considers its influence on a myriad of spheres, including purchasing decisions and consumer loyalty (Dowling, 2006b; Greyser, 1999; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Shapiro, 1983), employee loyalty (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Roberts & Dowling, 2002), product and service quality (Dowling, 2006b; Fombrun & Shanley, 1990), and the inimitability and competitive edge of organisations (Ang & Wight, 2009; Hall, 1992; Roberts & Dowling, 2002). Today, in a highly globalised and increasingly turbulent business environment that is often characterised by corporate venality, reputation is more important than ever (Reddiar, Kleyn & Abratt, 2012; Shamma, 2012).

Increased public awareness, scrutiny, and expectations from different stakeholder groups have contributed significantly to the importance and proactive management of corporate reputation, which has elevated it to the 'boardroom' as a strategic imperative (Highhouse et al., 2009; Reddiar et al., 2012; Shamma, 2012). Furthermore, academic interest in corporate reputation has intensified significantly over the years (Barnett, Jermier & Lafferty, 2006; Berens & van Riel, 2004; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Highhouse et al., 2009). An academic journal is focused exclusively on the topic ('Corporate Reputation Review'), and a brief 'Google' search of the term 'corporate reputation' leads one to a plethora of books and articles on the topic. Therefore, "Perhaps the most critical, strategic and enduring asset that a corporation possesses is its reputation" (Cravens et al., 2003, p. 201).



However, the fragile nature of corporate reputation has also increasingly surfaced – it must be assiduously and painstakingly achieved over many years, but can be lost instantly. As stated by Hall (1992), “Reputation, which is usually the product of years of demonstrated superior competence, is a fragile resource; it takes time to create, it cannot be bought, and it can be damaged easily” (p. 143).

## **2.2 A Positive Reputation Ensures the Support of Key Stakeholders**

A positive corporate reputation attracts the support of, and fosters long-term relationships with, multiple constituents (Puncheva, 2006; Shamma, 2012; Worcester, 2009). According to Dowling (2006a), “Many companies now have to actively proclaim their virtue to their stakeholders in order to revalidate their social and commercial ‘license to operate’” (p. 82). As indicated by Bromley (2002), companies that are not responsive to various stakeholder groups can expect to demonstrate poorer performance than those that are. These stakeholders include employees, customers, business partners and investors, shareholders, suppliers, government and regulators, local communities, and the media (Dowling, 2006a; Gray & Balmer, 1998; Puncheva, 2006; Shamma, 2012). Companies make various promises to each of these distinct stakeholder groups, which form the currency in the relationship between the company and the stakeholder group (Dowling, 2006a; Puncheva, 2006; Scott & Walsham, 2005). This is what Berens and van Riel (2004) term the “social expectations” (p. 161) that people have of companies.

The insight that reputation is inherently stakeholder-driven creates much complexity in its management. As stated by Helm and Gray (2009), “Although often called a corporate asset, reputation is not owned by the firm but by stakeholders who formulate expectations about a firm’s conduct, and then monitor and sanction it” (p. 65). Hence, the reputation that an organisation will eventually attain cannot be directly controlled and is a result of stakeholders’

attitudes towards, and relationships with, the organisation (Iwu-Egwuonwu, 2011). However, irrespective of the stakeholder group, there appears to be a general consensus on what a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ reputation is (Helm, 2007), although stakeholders’ expectations of companies can change widely over time, and be shaped by different contexts (Podnar, Tuškej & Golob, 2012). As suggested by Scott and Walsham (2005), “The relationship between the expectations of key stakeholders and the reputation claim is key; it must withstand ongoing scrutiny and assessment” (p. 312).

### **2.3 Multidisciplinary Lenses on Corporate Reputation**

The scholarship on corporate reputation has drawn from, and been enriched by, numerous diverse disciplines. Notably, the disciplines of strategy, economics, marketing, sociology, organisational behaviour, and accounting have ‘coloured’ the construct significantly and have resulted in both unique and overlapping insights (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012; Balmer, 2001; de Castro, López & Sáez, 2006; Fombrun & van Riel, 1997; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Highhouse et al., 2009; Puncheva, 2006). Furthermore, these diverse disciplinary perspectives have highlighted the benefits of corporate reputation, as well as the impact thereof on different stakeholder groups (Puncheva, 2006), for example, marketing theorists and practitioners have typically focused on customers, while organisational behaviour perspectives have focused on employees (Puncheva, 2006; Podnar et al., 2012; Vendelø, 1998).

While the richness of multidisciplinary perspectives potentially enables robust dialogue, debate and creativity, an inherent complexity and divergence of views is inevitable. This is captured by Brown et al. (2006) when they state that “...it is difficult to follow a threaded conversation within, and especially across, disciplinary sectors” (p. 100).

## 2.4 A Nebulous Corporate Reputation Definitional Landscape

The vast amount of research available on how to define corporate reputation is indicative of a lack of conceptual clarity and the absence of a common language (Helm & Gray, 2009). The corporate reputation landscape has thus been described as “elusive” (Podnar et al., 2012, p. 907), “amorphous” (Schwaiger, 2004, p. 46), “Byzantine in complexity” (Balmer, 2001, p. 252), “muddled” (Ponzi, Fombrun & Gardberg, 2011, p.17) and as “rugged terrain” (Barnett et al., 2006, p. 28). Much of this conceptual ambiguity can be attributed to the multidisciplinary nature of corporate reputation, and the lack of consensus on terms and axioms of analysis (Fombrun & van Riel, 1997; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Helm & Gray, 2009) due to various “disciplinary blinders” in approaching research on the subject (Barnett et al., 2006, p. 28).

Wartick (2002) argues that “...many deficiencies in definition and data can be attributed to the fact that theory development related to corporate reputation has been insufficient” (p. 371). Walker (2010) echoes these sentiments in highlighting “...the need for a comprehensive and well-accepted definition, the difficulty in operationalizing corporate reputation, and the ongoing need for more developed theory” (p. 357). The profusion of different conceptualisations of corporate reputation attests to both the widespread interest in the subject, and the fact that it is a “...composite concept, affected by multiple constitutive influences” (Scott & Walsham, 2005, p. 311).

Hence, this ambiguity is also due to the fact that key terms are commonly used interchangeably, creating confusion. Much of this confusion relates to the concepts of corporate reputation, corporate identity, and corporate image (Brown et al., 2006; Caruana, 1997; Davies, Chun, da Silva & Roper, 2001; Highhouse et al., 2009; Shamma, 2012), which have been grasped as “conceptual cousins” (Winn, MacDonald & Zietsma, 2008, p. 36).

These three concepts have been used synonymously (Williams & Barrett, 2000), and have been said to be independent but closely related (Bromley, 2000; Hatch & Schultz, 1997). There are various permutations that have been posited, namely, that reputation is comprised of both identity and image (Davies et al., 2001; Wartick, 2002); identity leads to image, which in turn leads to reputation (Barnett et al., 2006; Pruzan, 2001); image is synonymous with reputation (Dutton et al., 1994; Kennedy, 1977; Williams & Barrett, 2000); and identity is synonymous with image (Wartick, 2002).

However, as indicated by Balmer (2001), “Vagaries in fashion in the use of the terms have played their part in thickening the fog surrounding the area” (p. 267). He describes how in the 1950s and 1960s, much attention was focused on ‘corporate image’ and was replaced by the term ‘corporate identity’ during the 1970s to cover matters pertaining to both image management and the visual identity branding aspects. In recent years, ‘corporate reputation’ has all but eclipsed the other two concepts as theoretical and practical interest in the area has grown.

As far back as 1996, Fombrun and Rindova called upon researchers and practitioners to create a unifying and integrated framework to navigate the corporate reputation landscape. Through their popular and well-cited definition of the construct of ‘corporate reputation’, they attempted to perpetuate a more aligned view, and negate the “fundamental barrier” related to the confounding conceptualisations of identity, image and reputation (Barnett et al., 2006, p. 28). They indicated that:

A corporate reputation is a collective representation of a firm’s past actions and results that describes the firm’s ability to deliver valued outcomes to multiple stakeholders. It gauges a firm's relative standing both internally with employees and externally with its

stakeholders, in both its competitive and institutional environments. (Fombrun & Rindova, 1996, as cited in Fombrun & van Riel, 1997, p. 10)

In this definition, ‘identity’ refers to the views of those inside the organisation (employees), while ‘image’ refers to the views of stakeholders outside the organisation (for example, customers, community members, and suppliers). ‘Reputation’ is seen as a construct that encompasses, and is a function of, identity and image (Davies et al., 2004; Wartick, 2002). In other words, reputation “...is the *de facto* accumulation of image and identity” (Clardy, 2012, p. 286). In his review of 54 well-cited articles from highly-regarded journals, Walker (2010) found that the use of this definition was a clear trend. While a useful distinction amongst the three terms, this definition is not universal as the terms are often used interchangeably, there are arguments for a particular hierarchy amongst the terms, and there is massive diversity and oftentimes a lack of specificity in the definitions of reputation (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Helm, 2007; Helm & Gray, 2009; Walker, 2010). Next, Table 1 provides a list of popular definitions of identity, image, and reputation. It further illustrates the multiplicity of perspectives that traverse the positioning of the three concepts in Fombrun and Rindova’s definition above.

Table 1: Examples of definitions of identity, image and reputation in the literature

Source	Identity	Image	Reputation
<b>Dutton et al. (1994)</b>	"...is a member's assessment of the organization's character" (p. 248).	"...refers to a member's beliefs about outsiders' perceptions of the organization" (p. 248).	"...outsiders' beliefs about what distinguishes an organization" (p. 249).
<b>Gray &amp; Balmer (1998)</b>	"...the reality and uniqueness of the organization. Its principal components are the company's strategy, philosophy, culture, and organizational design" (p. 696-697).	"...the immediate mental picture that audiences have of an organization" (p. 697).	"...indicates a value judgment about the company's attributes" (p. 697).
<b>Bromley (2000)</b>	"...defined as the way key members conceptualize their organization" (p. 241).	"...defined as the way an organization presents itself to its publics, especially visually" (p. 241).	"...defined as the way key external groups or other interested parties actually conceptualize that organization" (p. 241).
<b>Davies et al. (2001)</b>	"...taken to mean the internal, that is employees' view of the company" (p. 114).	"...taken to mean the view of the company held by external stakeholders, especially that held by customers" (p. 113).	"...taken to be a collective term referring to all stakeholders' views of corporate reputation, including identity and image" (p. 114).
<b>Argenti &amp; Druckenmiller (2004)</b>	"Consists of a company's defining attributes, such as its people, products and services" (p. 369).	"A reflection of an organization's identity and its corporate brand. The organization as seen from the viewpoint of one constituency. Depending on which constituency is involved (customers, employees, investors, etc.), an organization can have many different images" (p. 369).	"The collective representation of multiple constituencies' images of a company, built up over time and based on a company's identity programs, its performance and how constituencies have perceived its behaviour" (p. 369).
<b>Brown et al. (2006)</b>	"Mental associations about the organization held by organizational members" (p. 102).	<p><u>Intended Image:</u></p> <p>"Mental associations about the organization that organization leaders want important audiences to hold" (p. 102).</p> <p><u>Construed Image:</u></p> <p>"Mental associations that organization members believe others outside the organization hold about the organization" (p. 102).</p>	"Mental associations about the organization actually held by others outside the organization" (p. 102).

This study posits the notion that of all the stakeholder groups that engage with an organisation, employees are both central and critical to the reputation of organisations (this idea

is further expanded in Section 2.5). It is through this lens that my analysis of the concepts of corporate identity, image and reputation are outlined below.

#### **2.4.1 Corporate identity – what employees perceive, feel and think about their organisation**

Rather than simplistically viewing corporate identity as insiders' views of the organisation, Barnett et al. (2006) indicate that corporate identity has more to do with the essence of the firm, and 'what the firm is'. They state that "it is not identifying *with* a firm, but rather, the identity *of* the firm – what the firm actually is" (p. 33). Bromley (2001) states that identity is "...that set of attributes that distinguishes one organisation from another" (p. 316), while Gray and Balmer (1998) describe identity as "...the reality and uniqueness of the organization" (p. 696). Increasingly, academics have positioned and acknowledged the differentiating aspects of corporate identity, "...which are rooted in the behavior of members of the organization" (van Riel & Balmer, 1997, p. 341).

The foundations for conceptualising corporate identity were put in place by Albert and Whetten with their idea of the "central, enduring and distinctive" (CED) characteristics of organisations (Albert & Whetten, 1985, as cited in King & Whetten, 2008, p. 195), and was further elucidated by Fombrun and van Riel (2004) in the context of their work on reputation. In their research, they found that identity consists of features that employees consider *central* to the organisation, which position the organisation as *distinctive* from other organisations (from the perspective of employees), and features that are *enduring* and sustainable, thereby linking the past and present to the future. These conceptualisations of identity in the context of corporate reputation are strongly bounded with frameworks and theories in the organisational culture field, where questions of basic assumptions, shared beliefs, internal integration, symbols, and artefacts

are paramount (Dhalla, 2007; Martin, Feldman, Hatch & Sitkin, 1983; Schein, 1990; van Riel & Balmer, 1997). As such, Barnett et al. (2006) define corporate identity as “a collection of symbols” (p. 34).

Defining corporate identity as ‘what an organisation is’ may be criticised for being banal and confining in certain respects, however, it does steer thinking away from the narrow visual and graphic design perspective, which has been accorded much importance in the corporate identity sphere (Balmer, 2001). Visual identity refers to the visual cues that an organisation endorses and includes aspects like the company name, logo, slogans, and branding, which is frequently termed ‘CI’ – ‘corporate identity’ (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012; Hatch & Schultz, 1997; van Riel & Balmer, 1997). While visual identification and graphic design do have a certain vigour and purpose in corporate expression, it has “...exerted a deleterious influence regarding the conceptualisation of identity” (Balmer, 2001, p. 266), at times stifling a deeper scholarly recognition of the concept.

The distinction between the graphic and visual design aspects and organisational behaviour perspectives can be ascribed to disciplinary lenses. The focus on visual aspects has been encompassed by marketing literature, while the organisational literature has typically covered areas of organisational identification, commitment, values, and distinctive organisational characteristics (Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Stuart, 2002). Broadly, the organisational literature has covered “...what members perceive, feel and think about their organizations” (Hatch & Schultz, 1997, p. 357). As stated by Hatch and Schultz (1997), the marketing approach has specified the various channels through which the organisational identity is expressed to external audiences, while “...the organizational literature has been more concerned with the relationship between employees and their organization” (p. 357).



The stance taken in this study is that what the marketing literature advocates speaks more clearly to ‘corporate image’, which is the more “...tangible representation of the organizational identity” (Stuart, 2002, p. 32). Whilst it is inextricably bound to ‘organisational’ identity, as “...it is important to strike a balance between ‘what the organization is’ and how it wants to position itself to all stakeholder groups” (Stuart, 2002, p. 42), corporate image is fundamentally a business resource. Chun (2005) notes that the role of employees and the dynamic interrelatedness of internal and external perceptions have become pronounced within the subject of corporate identity. As stated by Corley (2004), identity “...represents insiders’ perceptions and beliefs about what distinguishes their organization from others and can provide the foundation for providing images of the organization to outsiders” (p. 1146). This view is expanded on further in the next section.

Hence, this study defines corporate identity as what employees perceive, think and feel about their organisation (Hatch & Schultz, 1997). The disciplinary distinction posited by the marketing and organisational literature on ‘corporate identity’ versus ‘organisational identity’ is negligible in the context of this study – what has been termed ‘corporate identity’ in the marketing world is essentially ‘corporate image’.

#### **2.4.2 Corporate image – a business resource**

Abratt and Mofokeng (2001) propose that corporate image is a “business resource” (p. 371) given the projected and deliberate nature of the communication that needs to occur from those inside the organisation to outside audiences. Hence, an internal image is projected externally (Walker, 2010), and “...there is a conscious effort to create a desired impression” (Bick, Jacobson & Abratt, 2003, p. 840). Instead of the common view that corporate image refers to outsider views of an organisation, in this study, corporate image is represented by the various

outgoing communication channels that organisations deploy to communicate with customers and other external stakeholders (Puncheva, 2006; Walker, 2010). Hatch and Schultz (1997), and Gotsi and Wilson (2001) echo this sentiment. In Walker's (2010) review of the corporate reputation literature, corporate image refers to *desired* perceptions in the majority of the articles. Desired perceptions denote an "...internal picture projected to an external audience" (p. 366). The thinking here is that organisations actively project images to the outside, and these cannot be negative unless deliberately so. Hence, the primary purpose of corporate image is to cultivate positive perceptions about the organisation in outsiders (Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Marziliano, 1998). As such, there have been criticisms leveled at organisations' very overt practice of creating desired impressions in outsiders (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Podnar et al., 2012). Marziliano (1998) points to how some perceive image as being a "façade" (p. 9).

Corporate communication certainly has a significant role to play in the cultivation of corporate image, therefore, the various communication mechanisms employed by the organisation include an annual report, advertisements, marketing campaigns, branding strategies and public relations activities (Cornelissen, 2000; Gray & Balmer, 1998; Hatch & Schultz, 2002). As indicated in Section 2.4.1 on 'corporate identity', it also includes coordinated visual aspects, namely, logos, signage and the like (Gray & Balmer, 1998).

What is inherent in the opinions expressed on corporate image is that corporate identity is the source of corporate image (Bick et al., 2003; Hatch & Schultz, 2002) and corporate image therefore "...emanates from within the organization" (Walker, 2010, p. 366). Yet again, employees are central in the conceptualisation of corporate image, which is a compelling idea in the context of this study. Hence, this study defines the business resource of corporate image as what employees deliberately project about their organisation to influence how others think about

their organisation. As such, other popular definitions of corporate image are rejected, namely, that image is what organisational members think outsiders think of the organisation (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Dutton et al., 1994), and what outsiders think of an organisation (Gatewood, Gowan & Lautenschlager, 1993; Lemmink, Schuijf & Streukens, 2003).

The former definition is seen to be more in line with notions of ‘*perceived* corporate reputation’, and the latter with ‘corporate reputation’ as will be further explored in Section 2.4.3 and Section 2.5.2 below.

### **2.4.3 Corporate reputation refers to ‘outsider’ perceptions**

This study posits two fundamental facets of corporate reputation, firstly, that it refers to actual, outsider stakeholders’ perceptions of an organisation, and, secondly, that it can be differentiated from the construct of ‘corporate image’ in terms of time and stability.

As indicated by numerous authors, although there are various definitions of ‘corporate reputation’, it most likely represents outsiders’ views and perceptions of an organisation (Carmeli, 2004; Carmeli, 2005; Carmeli, Gilat & Weisberg, 2006; Dutton et al, 1994; Helm, 2013; Puncheva, 2006; Rho, Yun & Lee, 2015; Shamma, 2012; Winn et al., 2008). These outside stakeholders include customers, business partners, investors, shareholders, suppliers, government and regulators, local communities, and the media (Dowling, 2006a; Gray & Balmer, 1998; Puncheva, 2006; Shamma, 2012).

Employees engage with the organisation consistently and within the dynamic of day-to-day interactions, whereas there is some ‘distance’ that is evident when outsiders formulate their views and perceptions of an organisation, oftentimes on the basis of limited contextual information (Alvesson, 1998; Clardy, 2012; Puncheva, 2006). It is therefore likely that there is

more ‘objectivity’ in these perceptions and that they are actual perceptions, rather than *desired* perceptions, as in the case of corporate image (Marziliano, 1998).

However, as postulated in Section 2.4, there is inherent ambiguity in these definitional aspects, therefore the conceptualisation of reputation as outsiders’ perceptions is not settled. Barnett et al. (2006) surveyed literature between 2000 and 2003 and uncovered 46 distinctive meanings of corporate reputation. In their analysis, they categorised the definitions according to their similarities and differences, and discovered three relatively distinct clusters: reputation as a state of awareness (referring to perceptions and representations of knowledge and emotions), reputation as a form of assessment (referring to judgments, estimations or gauges), and reputation as an asset (referring to reputation as a resource, or asset of financial or economic value).

Contrary to the view in this study that reputation refers to outsiders’ *perceptions*, Barnett et al. (2006) emphasise that ‘assessment’ definitions featured prominently in the literature, and based on their lexicological review, concluded that ‘assessment’ terms like “judgment, estimation, evaluation or gauge” (p. 26) were more appropriate to study. The Oxford Dictionary’s definition of ‘perception’ is “the way in which something is regarded, understood or interpreted” (“Oxford Dictionary, 2016). This is found to be more pertinent in the context of this study as it is a more encompassing conceptualisation of reputation, accommodating the plethora of impressions, views, knowledge and emotions that people outside an organisation can have of it (Wartick, 2002).

It is also prudent to distinguish between ‘image’ and ‘reputation’ as this has often been unclear. Furthermore, time and stability factors are important here (Bick et al., 2003; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Gray & Balmer, 1998; Highhouse et al., 2009; Scott & Walsham, 2005; Walker,

2010). These authors emphasise that image is transient and immediate, while reputation is a more stable and enduring construct. As stated by Scott and Walsham (2005), corporate reputation is “cumulative” (p. 311), as it is constructed incrementally over time.

Bick et al. (2003) capture the difference between image and reputation as follows, “Image is the immediate impression of an organisation whilst reputation is a stakeholder’s overall assessment of the organisation’s ability to meet pre-defined criteria (set by the stakeholder) such as integrity” (p. 841). A positive, valued reputation requires more than a concerted communication effort to project favourable messages to the outside, as “...corporate reputations, typically, evolve over time as a result of consistent performance, reinforced by effective communication, whereas corporate images can be fashioned more quickly through well-conceived communication programmes” (Gray & Balmer, 1998, p. 697). As aptly described by Chun (2005), “We can form an image of an organization without any real experience of it, whereas something deeper, often referred to as reputation, implies something grounded in experience” (p. 96).

## **2.5 Corporate Identity, Image and Reputation Are Inextricably Bound**

What has been somewhat latent in the preceding sections is that there is a dynamic interrelationship between corporate identity, image and reputation, with employees of organisations being very much at the core of corporate identity and image, thereby influencing reputation (outside perceptions) to a great degree. This idea is further expounded in various ways by the authors studied in this literature review. Johnston and Everett (2012), for example, speak of employees using their identity as a foundation for images that are presented to outsiders. Balmer and Gray (1999) once again highlight the pivotal role of corporate communication when they state that, “Corporate communication is the process through which stakeholders perceive

the company's identity and image and reputation are formed" (p. 171), and that "...corporate communications forms a tri-partite bridge between an organisation's identity and the resultant image and reputation" (p. 174). Kennedy (1977) and Puncheva (2006) describe employees as being a vital information intermediary to the outside world, while Shamma and Hassan (2009) state that "Employees help in the creation of word-of-mouth communications about a company and they contribute significantly to supporting and communicating a company's reputation" (p. 335).

The reciprocity of reputation is evident when the inside-outside dynamic is examined in terms of employee and customer perceptions. As stated by Davies, Chun and Kamins (2010), employee and customer views of reputation are interrelated. Davies, Chun, da Silva and Roper (2004) explain that these perspectives are linked and interdependent, while Hatch and Schultz (1997) find that "...the categories of internal and external relations are collapsing together in organizational practice" (p. 356). Johnston and Everett (2012) write of the "...alignment of internal understanding and external expectations" (p. 551) and describe how the internal constitution of an organisation plays a key role in influencing how environmental scanning and external interfacing is conducted. Furthermore, Dhalla (2007) elucidates this reciprocity of reputation in describing how consistently positive media attention and external recognition can contribute to the construction of a strong organisational identity.

To date, a number of studies have, in fact, suggested that identity is the foundation of reputation (Brown et al., 2006; Davies et al., 2004; Pruzan, 2001; Whetten & Mackey, 2002). Essentially, this denotes that employees are the bedrock of corporate reputations. Hatch and Schultz (1997) capture this idea succinctly in stating, "When we express organizational identity we use our cultural artefacts symbolically to present an image that will be interpreted by others"

(p. 360) and therefore, "...who we are is reflected in what we are doing and how others interpret who we are and what we are doing" (p. 361). Illia and Lurati (2006) raise the topic of "...the relational nature of organizational identity" (p. 293), and describe how organisations compare themselves to others and incorporate the feedback of others to decrease the gap between what the organisation is and how others perceive it externally. This culminates in the "...process of how identity changes its characteristics according to the interpretation of the mirrored images and how members experience themselves as an organization" (p. 295).

### **2.5.1 Employees are the bedrock of corporate reputations**

While all stakeholder groups have a vital role to play in the development and maintenance of corporate reputations, this study argues that employees are the bedrock of corporate reputations. The construct of 'reputation' is founded internally in companies, and is "...rooted in the sense-making experiences of employees" (Fombrun & van Riel, 1997, p. 8). Employees are the means through which corporate reputations are reified in the minds of all stakeholders. Therefore, if employees are not loyal to a company, or are not aligned with its vision or strategy, it is unlikely that any other stakeholder group will be (Carmeli, 2004; Cravens et al., 2003). Many studies have emphasised the 'shaping' role that employees have on the reputation of companies (de Chernatony, 1999; Dowling, 2006a; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Kennedy, 1977; Stuart, 1999). Companies allocate generous funds to media and community initiatives to engender positive relationships with external stakeholders, but are often not cognisant that individual employees can undermine these very initiatives simply by what they express about the organisation (Crescenzo, 2005; Davies et al., 2010). As stated by Hall (1993), "A key task of management is to make sure that every employee is disposed to be both a promoter and a custodian of the reputation of the organization which employs him" (p. 616).

This idea is further bolstered by Helm (2011), who draws attention to the pivotal role that employee engagement plays in reputation management. Shamma and Hassan (2009) further highlight the significance of "...investing in training, motivating and the internal marketing of corporate reputation" (p. 335).

Several authors have given credence to the notion that the greatest reputational leverage can be achieved through employees (Dowling & Moran, 2012; Gray & Balmer, 1998; Helm, 2011; Shamma & Hassan, 2009). As early as 1977, Kennedy (1977) positioned employees as being pivotal in projecting a positive corporate image. As stated by Abratt and Kleyn (2012), "Employees play an important role in influencing a brand's relationship with its customers and other stakeholders" (p. 1056).

Corporate reputation impacts employees in significant ways, namely, in their job application and employment intentions (Cable & Graham, 2000; Gatewood et al., 1993; Lemmink et al., 2003; Turban & Greening, 2000); it enables the attraction and retention of the most skilled and capable employees (Albinger & Freeman, 2000; Podnar et al., 2012; Schwaiger, 2004); and encourages more satisfied, committed and productive employees who are often willing to go beyond their functional roles to engage in organisational cooperative and citizenship behaviours (Caruana, 1997; Davies, 2008; Dutton et al., 1994; Highhouse et al., 2009; Podnar et al., 2012; Worcester, 2009). The role of employees in cultivating and maintaining corporate reputations is starkly brought to the fore by Iwu-Egwuonwu (2011), who says the following, "How these employees are treated and the quality of their workplace behavior seep out into the public domain and thus affect the reputation or otherwise which an organization will be associated with" (p. 200). Herein lies the notion that identity perpetuates reputation, bringing the reciprocity of reputation once again to the fore.



The notion of ‘perceived corporate reputation’ gives further impetus to the dynamic interrelationship between the concepts of identity, image and reputation. It also further concretises the idea that employees are the bedrock of corporate reputations, as will be evidenced below.

### **2.5.2 Perceived corporate reputation**

In their seminal study on the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, Dutton and Dukerich (1991) found that employees’ sense of self and personal identities were greatly influenced by how they believed others outside their organisation perceived the organisation. When there was a spate of negative public sentiments expressed about the Port Authority’s treatment of the homeless, employees experienced distress. Prior to the negative attention, this organisation had enjoyed an illustrious public reputation for years, which conferred great pride upon its employees. Inside this organisation, the members absorbed this negative publicity and became anxious about these outside perceptions. Dutton and Dukerich (1991) found that employees “...keep one eye on the organizational mirror when they interpret, react and commit to organizational actions” (p. 551). Dutton et al. (1994) also underscored that employees’ “...well-being and behavior are affected both by the attributes they ascribe to themselves and by those they believe others infer about them from their organizational membership” (p. 240).

As Helm (2011) indicates, “The relationship between a firm’s reputation and its employees is two-sided” (p. 657). Employees actively mould outsiders’ perceptions of the organisation, and more so in service organisations where employees are in direct and frequent contact with customers (Chun, 2005; Helm, 2011). As noted by Chun (2005), “The link between happy employees and happy customers is intuitively attractive and forms a key part of some models of organizational effectiveness” (p. 105). However, employees themselves are affected

by the external perceptions of the organisation and are sensitive to outside judgments (Dhalla, 2007; Helm, 2011; Helm, 2013; Riordan, Gatewood & Bill, 1997). When employees perceive that outsiders view the organisation in a positive light, they “...bask in the reflected glory” of the organisation (Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman & Sloan, 1976, p. 367) and display the positive attributes associated with organisational identification (Carmeli, Gilat & Weisberg, 2006; Ciftcioglu, 2010; Dutton et al., 1994). This organisational identification refers to the deep levels of attachment that employees may feel for an organisation, even incorporating the characteristics of the organisation into their own self-concepts (Dhalla, 2007; Dutton et al., 1994; Illia & Lurati, 2006). It has, in fact, become commonly known that this employee pride and attachment is an antecedent of organisational identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Bartels, Pruyn, de Jong & Joustra, 2007; Mael & Ashforth, 1992).

Pruzan (2001) cites the example of Heineken in Holland, who withdrew their business activities from Burma, not only due to political pressures from the outside, but greatly due to the perceptions and expectations of Heineken’s own employees, who wanted to experience pride in being associated with the company. In this context, Pruzan (2001) speaks of the increasing sensitivity that employees have to corporate reputation, while Stuart (2002) states that “...there is a background effect associated with weakened employee identification, namely that lowered staff morale affects external stakeholders in an insidious way” (p. 38).

Being part of a successful and well-regarded team fosters a strong organisational identification amongst employees that can manifest itself in affective attachment to the organisation (Carmeli & Freund, 2002; Carmeli et al., 2006; Ciftcioglu, 2010), reduced staff turnover (Ciftcioglu, 2010; Helm, 2013; Mishra, 2013; Swider, Zimmerman, Boswell & Hinrichs, 2011), intra-organisational cooperation and citizenship behaviour (Carmeli, 2005;

Dutton et al., 1994), and higher levels of employee engagement (Bartels et al., 2007; Men, 2012). Employees also experience elevated levels of pride, and hence self-worth, when associated with a prestigious organisation (Carmeli, 2004; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Swider et al., 2011), which further enhances their identification with the organisation (Bartels et al., 2007; Carmeli et al., 2006; Ciftcioglu, 2010; Helm, 2013; Smidts, Pruyn, and van Riel, 2001). As stated by Helm (2013), “Being part of an organisation with a favourable external reputation is likely to instil pride in employees, potentially strengthening the bond between the employee and the organization” (p. 543).

The converse is also true. Due to negative external perceptions of the organisation, employees can experience depression and stress that can result in negative organisational performance. This may include unhealthy competition amongst employees and a reduced focus on tasks, disengagement from the organisation, and even employees exiting the organisation (Dutton et al., 1994; Mishra, 2013). Helm (2013) states that working for an organisation of ill-repute can lead to embarrassment and discomfort, impacting employees’ self-esteem and culminating in them leaving the organisation. Pruzan (2001) further finds that in these contexts, employees’ experience lowered morale, enthusiasm and motivation levels. As Riordan et al. (1997) indicate, positive external perceptions are positively related to employees’ job satisfaction and negatively related to their intentions to leave the organisation, while employees in organisations that are poorly regarded by outsiders are more inclined to be dissatisfied at work and to disassociate from the organisation. As stated by Dutton and Dukerich (1991), this helps to explain “...how individuals become motivated to push for and against organizational initiatives” (p. 550). Helm (2011) terms this phenomenon ‘perceived corporate reputation,’ and explains that “corporate reputation is a socially shared impression – a collective construct – because it relies

on an individual's perception of how other people view the firm” (p. 657-658). Dutton et al. (1994) refer to this as ‘construed external image’, which is “...the potentially powerful mirror, reflecting back to the members how the organization and the behavior of its members are likely being seen by outsiders” (p. 249). They further indicate that “public impressions of the organization and of the organization’s members become part of the currency through which members’ self-concepts and identification are built or are eroded” (p. 241). This then begs the question, “How do outsiders think of me because of my association with the organization?” (p. 248). Bartels et al. (2007); Carmeli (2004, 2005); Carmeli and Freund (2002); Ciftcioglu (2010) and Smidts et al. (2001) refer to the construct as ‘perceived external prestige’. This can be defined as “...a belief held by members regarding how outsiders view the organization” (Carmeli & Freund, 2002, p. 51). This dynamic interplay amongst identity, image and reputation is eloquently discussed by Helm (2011) who explains that, “Corporate reputation is crucial in determining work related social identity because employees are associated with the brilliant, as well as the blemished, reputation of their employer” (p. 661).

## **2.6 Summary of the Chapter**

The reciprocity of reputation, and the centrality of employees in its conceptualisation was explained in this section. Perceived corporate reputation was shown to be a powerful concept as it provides impetus to the dynamic exchange amongst the concepts of identity, image and reputation, impacting employees’ levels of identification and commitment to the organisation.

## CHAPTER 3—APPLYING THE CORPORATE REPUTATION DISCOURSE IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

The aim of this chapter is to elucidate how South Africa's current dire political context requires that attention is provided to a number of challenges. These include local government's ability to deliver adequate services to all, the skills development issues government faces, and the scourge of corruption that is shaking its very foundations. Public sector employees are critical in ensuring that government begins to develop a positive reputation as a compromised sense of identification and commitment on their part impedes the road to progress. However, this is particularly troublesome and difficult to achieve in a public sector context that is as 'loaded' as South Africa's. As will be illustrated below, employees' perceived organisational reputation is potentially compromised because of these various contextual and legacy factors. While employees shape outsiders' perceptions of the organisation, they are concurrently affected and shaped by outsiders' perceptions too. This is the power of perceived organisational reputation.

### **3.1 A Growing Call for Studies on Reputation in the Public Sector**

Despite the headway made in research on reputation in the private sector ('corporate reputation'), it is evident that research on reputation in the public sector is meagre and has largely been neglected. Focused academic work on reputation in the public sector is therefore still in its infancy (Carpenter & Krause, 2012; da Silva & Batista, 2007; Luoma-aho, 2007). As stated by Luoma-aho (2007), "The efficiency and reputation of the public sector is of central value, yet there is a gap in research on public sector organizations" (p. 125).

Increasingly, public sector organisations are beginning to understand the benefits of a good reputation in their knowledge-based environments, which depends very much on diverse

stakeholders' appraisals of their services (Luoma-aho, 2007; Luoma-aho, 2008; Luoma-aho & Makikangas, 2014). According to Luoma-aho (2007), intangibility is even more important in the public sector than in the private sector as public sector organisations have a multitude of non-financial objectives, and use intangibles such as human resources and knowledge more intensively. Although there are very tangible offerings that are rendered by public sector organisations, for example, constructing a bridge or a road, most services that are delivered are intangible in nature (Cinca, Molinero & Queiroz, 2003). Objectives such as pursuing justice and a safe environment, for example, are intangible, and differ markedly from the profit-generating mindset of the private sector.

Globally, over the past few decades, public sector organisations have diversified and grown in both function and size, while resources have increasingly come under threat (Carpenter & Krause, 2012; Harisalo & Stenvall, 2003). Therefore, the public sectors' legitimisation of their services has become pertinent, and reputation has progressively come into focus (Carpenter & Krause, 2012). According to Carpenter and Krause (2012), "In democratic settings, public administration cannot operate in an organizational vacuum" (p. 26). Therefore, maintaining broad-based support for its activities whilst rendering consistency and flexibility in its oversight hinges strongly on a strong organisational reputation (Carpenter & Krause, 2012). Carpenter and Krause (2012) further state that "...when it comes to complex public organizations and their manifold audiences, it is not too far a stretch to conclude that 'beliefs are all we have'" (p. 31).

### **3.2 The Unique Challenges and Complexities in the Public Sector**

The public sector's purpose differs significantly from that of the private sector (Luoma-aho, 2007; Pollitt, 2003; Schwella, 2008). The bottom line in the public sector is not about financial gain, but rather about the benefits to society (Cinca et al., 2003; Ryan, 2007). This is

why management and performance measurement cannot simplistically be defined in terms of profit, customer satisfaction or even efficiencies (Schwella, 2008). Decisions are made in a non-market environment where revenue is secured through budget allocations rather than through the provision of goods and services – and these goods and services are often monopolistic or enforced (Pollitt, 2003). There are also other inherent complexities in the public sector:

- Public leadership takes place within a socio-political context, containing significant tensions between political processes and role players. The motivations of political leaders are therefore different to those of leaders in the private sector (Jørgensen, Hansen, Antonsen & Melander, 1998; Pollitt, 2003);
- There is an inherent complexity in maintaining the balance between consistency and flexibility, as public officials try to mitigate against political uncertainty by keeping options open – they may therefore be viewed as ‘hedging their bets’ by the public but may actually be engaged in a strategy of negotiation amongst various audiences (Carpenter & Krause, 2012);
- The public arena is characterised by some turbulence in the form of public protest and pressure, which is often evidence of a functioning democracy. In the private sector, this would be evidence of dysfunction (Pollitt, 2003);
- Public accountability is paramount, and the need for transparency and openness is very pronounced in the public sector (Pollitt, 2003). The need to report all dealings and intense public scrutiny constrains public managers in their reputation management pursuits (Carpenter & Krause, 2012). As indicated by Cinca et al. (2003), public sector officials have far less room to navigate in this regard;

- There is a high degree of differentiation in the public sector in terms of staff, functions, and political allegiance (Carpenter & Krause, 2012). The decentralisation of authority and operations is often necessary, which can refer to geographic decentralisation, or specialisation based on a span of control (Carpenter & Krause, 2012). However, this fuels the fragmentation that generally characterises the public sector, and concretises the idea that “not everyone in a public agency is on the same page” (Carpenter & Krause, 2012, p. 28). This is what Frederickson (1999) terms the “disarticulated state” (p. 702);
- The public sector has multiple, diverse audiences. As stated by Luoma-aho (2007), “Public sector organizations serve as legislators, officials, regulators, educators, development and research centers, and as such cannot always please all stakeholders” (p. 127). Meeting the expectations of one set of stakeholders often means neglecting the needs of another set, or imparting equivocation (Carpenter & Krause, 2012; da Silva & Batista, 2007). However, stakeholders themselves do not see the inherent complexity and multitude of public sector networks and ‘actors’, they pass “judgments that are culturally, economically, politically and socially consequential – about what they and others perceive as unified entities responsible for outcomes” (Carpenter & Krause, 2012, p. 29). This further exacerbates the “bad apple effects” that occur when a poor reputation spreads from one public sector entity that has committed an impropriety to another (p. 29).
- Finally, for public sector organisations, achieving absolute success in their reputation management efforts seems unobtainable, especially under the scrutiny of multiple stakeholders in a context where there is usually no competition (Cinca et al., 2003).



This idea is given impetus by Luoma-aho (2007), who argues that a *neutral* reputation rather than an excellent one is the ideal in the public sector, which often faces cuts in funding and resources. The cultivation of an excellent reputation may therefore prove burdensome. She proposes that the ideal reputation would be one high enough for the organisation to have credibility “...but neutral or even low enough to acquire the necessary operating distance necessary (sic) especially in times of crisis” (p. 129). Hence, a ‘strong’ reputation in the public sector may very well be a ‘neutral’ one relative to the private sector.

### **3.3 The Juxtaposition of Developed and Developing States**

It is, however, important to recognise that there are vast differences in the challenges experienced by developed and developing countries. The state plays a pivotal role in development, yet in many developing countries, the capacity and institutional strength of the state itself is not sufficient to fuel this development (United Nations, 2015). As stated by Itika, de Ridder and Tollenaar (2011), “Public administration in developing countries is administration in transformation” (p. 1). While there are developing countries with expanding economies and fairly strong institutional and policy environments, they continue to grapple with service delivery challenges; Nigeria and Brazil are cited as two such examples (Foresti, 2014). However, nowhere are challenges as severe as in fragile, conflict-afflicted countries such as Pakistan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who are caught between the difficult juncture of building institutions of state and delivering the most basic of services (Slater, 2014).

In Africa, poor governance and the ineffective functioning of public institutions are major constraints to establishing parity in these societies (United Nations Development Programme, 2013). Furthermore, drawing on public sector reforms and innovations from developed countries

such as the United Kingdom and New Zealand is oftentimes not ‘fit for purpose’ as “...many of these concepts are very much interwoven in the social fabric of the country in which they originated” (Itika et al., 2011). As stated by the United Nations Development Programme (2013), “Even in many democracies of the developing countries the quality of public management depends to a large extent on the nature of party politics and the quality of political leadership” (p.15). Furthermore, the political will required to implement the type of administrative reforms necessary to effect real systemic change has been superseded by the “...immediate political pressures for distribution of patronage” (United Nations Development Programme, 2013, p. 15), hence “...there is no time or inclination for the ministers and bureaucrats to improve governance, do conceptual thinking to design good programmes, weed out those that are not functioning well, and monitor the programmes with a view to take remedial action to improve the effectiveness of delivery” (p. 15).

These are the very challenges facing South Africa’s public sector, more on which is covered in Section 3.5. As articulated by Story (2015):

In the case of South Africa, we may say that the country is converging on a set of criteria that are always up for discussion, given the ebb and flow of debate about appropriate policy in the global conversation. However, South Africa remains *sui generis*, comparable in many ways to many countries: to the UK, for instance, in terms of law, politics or finance; to The Netherlands, in terms of the Dutch Reformed Church and Roman Law; to Brazil in terms of its natural wealth and its race/class disparities; to India, in terms of the legacy bequeathed by Nehru and Mandela, two very different leaders, but convinced of the rightness of their cause that group politics was not the answer to the necessary modernisation of their countries. South Africa, in short, is different, like all other states

and peoples, with their own histories and trajectories, which are not predestined to take one path or another, but from which there can be no escape. (p. 546)

### **3.4 The Power of a Strong Public Sector Reputation**

It is evident from the section above that not only are the public and private sectors different in many respects, but they *should* be different. If this were not the case, the public sector would become enmeshed in moral, ethical, executive and operational conflicts (Schwella, 2008). Given this context, it is understandable that there is a dearth of literature that fortifies the positioning of reputation within a public sector context, and it has thus remained a neglected resource in the public sector (Luoma-aho, 2007).

Despite this, “An era of understanding the benefits of reputation in the public sector can be said to have begun” (Luoma-aho, 2007, p. 136). Luoma-aho (2007) further indicates that “...the fact that the organization is run on public funding does not erase the importance of stakeholder views; if anything, it makes all stakeholders ‘shareholders’” (p. 126). Ryan (2007) finds that despite the fundamental differences between the public and private sectors, reputation and its management is pertinent to the public sector, and is essential in delivering both quality services and quantity. Andreassen (1994) shares this sentiment, and states that the satisfaction and loyalty of customers, and reputation, are pivotal for the optimal performance of government. Furthermore, he explains how from an economic perspective, governments with a sound reputation could effectively contribute to maintaining existing businesses, and also to attracting new businesses within their jurisdictions. This would have the effect of maximising employment, and reducing negative perceptions of public officials, therefore increasing trust and public participation, and more importantly, engagement in public affairs and societal improvements.

Furthermore, public sector reputation management that is focused on building stakeholder participation, interaction, trust and accountability is paramount to ensuring the success and survival of these institutions in the future (da Silva & Batista, 2007; Kumar & Paddison, 2000; Luoma-aho & Makikangas, 2014; Mower, 2001). According to Luoma-aho (2007), it is also potentially advantageous that reputation management in the public sector does not require inordinate amounts of money or time as the focus centres on maintaining stakeholder expectations and trust in everyday dealings. She also indicates that there is less “pressure to quantify” in public sector organisations as intangible assets contribute to optimising the functioning of public services, whereas in the private sector, intangible assets contribute to the generation of profits (p. 136).

Ryan (2007) reiterates the importance of building public trust in the public sector fraternity, and suggests that private sector indicators of corporate reputation can, with some discretion and judgment, be extrapolated to the public sector. These indicators comprise organisational culture and leadership, corporate governance, quality products and services, and social and environmental responsibility. Building trust in these indicators can enhance the reputation of the public sector as they each have a pertinent place and nuance within a public sector context, even if the principal goal is not to build profits.

This section highlights the applicability and potential power of the concept of ‘corporate reputation’ in the public sector. For the purposes of this study, the terms ‘*organisational* reputation’ rather than ‘corporate reputation,’ and ‘perceived *organisational* reputation’ rather than ‘perceived corporate reputation’ will be used going forward.

### **3.5 South Africa – a ‘Loaded’ Public Sector Legacy**

Public sectors and institutions across the world have been vexed by similar themes over the past few decades. These relate to immense challenges with regard to globalisation, the increasing complexity of public problems, inequality in society, the challenges of good governance, and a lack of capacity to address critical social issues (Schwella, 2008). Furthermore, the growing impetus for administrative reform, decentralising government institutions, and the general disintegration of confidence in government institutions has exacerbated an already problematic public sector context (da Silva & Batista, 2007; Schwella, 2008).

South Africa’s public sector has not been immune to these global challenges and trends, and is embedded in unique social, political and economic relations that are “heavily influenced by particular histories of state administrations related to the legacy of apartheid and the nature of the political transition to democracy” (Chipkin & Meny-Gibert, 2012, p. 102). The idea that “...the reputations of public organizations is bound up with the legitimacy of the state” (Carpenter & Krause, 2012) and that a bad public sector reputation represents “a crisis of legitimacy” (Luoma-aho, 2007, p. 130) has particular resonance in South Africa’s current socio-political context.

South Africa is indubitably facing this crisis of legitimacy. Strong public interest in recent allegations of ‘state capture’; sinister deals concerning state-owned enterprises; and the corruption allegations that have been swirling around numerous politicians and institutions, including the Hawks, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and the South African Police Services (SAPS) have created instability and a poor reputation for government in South Africa. Furthermore, factions within the ruling party, the African National Congress

(ANC), along with threats of a credit downgrade for the country, have set off alarm bells regarding a faltering democracy. Malan's (2001) explanation is particularly poignant in light of the reputational crisis that the country faces, "Public sector leadership and behavior form a major yardstick to measure a country's morality and credibility in the eyes of the rest of the world..." (p. 10).

Employing a "historical lens" is germane to understanding the nuances of the public sector in South Africa (Chipkin & Meny-Gibert, 2012, p. 102). As stated by Franks (2015), despite the triumph of a peaceful political regime change, "...South Africa's transition to democracy has stumbled in important ways, slowing the developmental agenda" (p. 234). The public sector inherited by the new government in 1994 not only comprised a structure designed to serve the needs of a White minority, but was also a coercive oligarchy systematically ensuring the socio-economic and political oppression of Black South Africans (Nengwekhulu, 2009).

Although there has been significant public sector reform in South Africa since 1994, Chipkin and Meny-Gibert (2012) argue that the "original DNA" of the apartheid state has been retained (p. 104). By the end of apartheid, South Africa was governed and administered by a perplexing array of entities. These were a tri-cameral parliament consisting of three houses of parliament, a President's Council, and the turgid homeland administrations that duplicated administrative functions in eight areas in the country, thereby creating the veneer of these homeland states being independent. Nepotism, incompetence, and corruption flourished within the homelands' "culture of patronage" (p. 108). As stated by Chipkin and Meny-Gibert (2012):

At the time of South Africa's transition to democracy there were nearly 650 000 homeland officials, often with rudimentary qualifications, formed and apprenticed in

dysfunctional administrations that operated less according to standing orders and impersonal processes and more through patronage and personal rule. (p. 107)

The integration of the homeland states into the new provincial government has resulted in the perpetuation of apartheid era corruption and a lack of promised service delivery improvements (Chipkin & Meny-Gibert, 2012). Chipkin (2016) reiterates the historical factors that need to be borne in mind in order to understand South Africa's journey to democracy:

The problem, as I see it, is the absence of a historical sensibility, not just about South Africa's past but about the past of the world. Political debate in South Africa consistently fails to acknowledge two overriding features of the South African state. In the first place, it is a new state – a little more than a 100 years old. Secondly, during its short life it has existed as a national territory for only brief periods – for a few years after 1910 and then formally from 1994. For most of the twentieth century South Africa existed as a partial national state, governed through multiple and parallel administrations – usually organized on the basis of race or a notion of tribe. The Bantustans are the culmination of this politics of fragmentation and undoing. One of the major challenges of state-building in post-Apartheid South Africa has, therefore, been integrating former homeland administrations in new government arrangements and pacifying their various elites.

<http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2016-07-31-in-jacob-zuma-south-africa-has-found-its-gorbachev/#.WCNEXNV96po>)

Political stability was the primary focus in the early years characterising the transition to democracy, and less attention was given to how the new government would be structured and developed. Hence, inherent dysfunction has been perpetuated in government, and the subsequent

focus on New Public Management (NPM) reforms and techniques has done little to focus on the historical ‘baggage’ that continues to plague South Africa’s public sector (Chipkin & Meny-Gibert, 2012; Louw, 2012). These NPM reforms were instead focused on establishing a business outlook in the form of entrepreneurial strategies, and specific measurements and standards derived from the private sector. These were supposed to increase the flexibility, responsiveness, and adaptability of the public sector to its changing macro-environmental conditions (Chipkin & Meny-Gibert, 2012; Parker & Bradley, 2000). Furthermore, the new government has underestimated the complexities that would be encountered in the transformation of the pernicious public sector that it inherited, and thus adopted a short-term view that has had serious repercussions for its reputation (Kroukamp, 2002; Mpehle, 2012; Nengwekhulu, 2009; Theletsane, 2013).

In 2010, President Zuma appointed the National Planning Commission to conduct an extensive diagnostic exercise with people from ‘all walks of life’ in South Africa, which culminated in a National Development Plan that outlined South Africa’s achievements and deficiencies since 1994, as well as actions to be achieved by 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2012). The fact that South Africa’s public services are uneven and of an inferior quality was a major thrust in the findings of the Commission. Furthermore, the Commission found that deeply-rooted systemic problems compromise institutional capacity and vigour, resulting in constant policy changes, under-staffing and skills deficits, a lack of common purpose in public service, political interference, and a lack of accountability (National Planning Commission, 2012). Other identified societal ills included that unemployment is rife; the quality of education offered to the majority of the population is poor; infrastructure is poor; there are spatial divides; we have an unsustainable, resource-intensive economy; the public health system



is severely lacking; corruption levels are high; and South Africa remains a divided society (National Planning Commission, 2012).

The government has been beset with mammoth adaptation issues as the transformation required has been immense. Moving from a public sector dominated by one race group to a public sector with a diversity of race, culture and language groups has proved to be challenging. Furthermore, the move from a policy context in which privileged members of society received superior service compared to numerous disadvantaged communities, who were left destitute with little or no basic services, has required significant revisions to policies, resource allocations and the introduction of new public sector strategies and programmes (Franks, 2015; Russell & Bvuma, 2001; Tsheola, Ramonyai & Segage, 2014). Franks (2015) indicates that this context has “...resulted in poor management, deficient and partial decision-making, a too casual selection and placement of staff, excessive staff turnover, frequent misuse of training opportunities, and high levels of financial and administrative corruption” (p. 241).

To address the ‘double bind’ of inequality and poverty, and their related social problems, it is imperative for the state to play both a transformative and developmental role (National Planning Commission, 2012). Public sector employees are pivotal in ensuring that government develops a positive reputation for these efforts. As indicated by Carpenter and Krause (2012), “Although organizational reputations are characterized by beliefs held by external audience members (e.g. elected officials, clientele groups, the media, policy experts, and ordinary citizens), the latter also are developed endogenously by the internal character of the administrative organization” (p. 26).

### **3.5.1 The local government sphere and the poor delivery of services**

Great euphoria accompanied the transition to a new South Africa, and with that, many underestimated the complexities involved in providing the services required for such a vast, oppressed community who now had to be involved meaningfully in the political spheres that controlled their lives (Franks, 2015; Reddy & Sabelo, 1997). The transition also placed massive responsibility on local government, which became viewed as an autonomous entity that is responsible for the wide-scale delivery of services (Kroukamp, 2008).

The communities, who for so long had been cast aside, had unrealistic expectations of service delivery, thus the failure to deliver basic services to those who needed them the most has over the years resulted in great disillusionment, and has severely compromised trust in local government (du Plessis, 2008; Koma, 2010; Kroukamp, 2008; Mafunisa, 2004). As stated by Netswera and Kgalane (2014), “Communities are more impatient now than they ordinarily would have been (sic) under the apartheid system which they knew was not their government and did not represent their aspirations” (p. 263). This attests to the mass protests, oftentimes violent and borne out of frustration that the South African population frequently experiences (Netswera & Kgalane, 2014; Tsheola et al., 2014). The “...persistent downward spiral of public perceptions of government performance in basic service delivery, enduring voter apathy and negative judgments of the direction the country is taking, which coincided with violent protests across South Africa, cannot be ignored” (Tsheola et al., 2014, p. 403).

Although government’s Batho Pele (‘People First’) principles aimed to create a more responsive local government interface between public officials and the public, consistently poor service delivery has had dire consequences for citizens’ levels of confidence in government (Draai, 2012; Kroukamp, 2001; Masango & Mutukana, 2014; Nengwekhulu, 2009).

Furthermore, “Citizens do not evaluate the performance of government holistically but rather in terms of isolated interaction with departments and they may generalise their experience towards other departments” (Draai, 2012, p. 498).

### **3.5.2 Skills development challenges in South Africa’s public service**

Skills development in South Africa’s public service remains a significant challenge to both democracy and institutional strength (Chelechele, 2009; Franks, 2015; Kroukamp, 2002; Masiloane & Dintwe, 2014). Kroukamp (2002) speaks of the fact that while many developed and developing economies were investing in the skills required for adaptation to global changes, South Africa was severely constrained by its political woes, which resulted in a severe lack of attention to the skills required for its workforce. The advent of democracy in the country brought with it rapid changes and a confusing and overwhelming environment for many, which was followed by the neglect of focused skills and capacity building in the sector (Franks, 2015). Gross, systemic inequalities in terms of skills in South Africa, and a consequent slow skills base, stem from the apartheid regime’s purposeful design of menial labour for South Africa’s Black population (Chelechele, 2009). Skills shortages in the public sector have contributed enormously to poor service delivery, maladministration and a poor reputation.

As clarified by Franks (2015), “When the apartheid-distorted civil service was overhauled, political allegiance overruled technical competence, in the Weberian sense, in the deployment of cadres to public service positions” (p. 234). In this context, there was a failure to focus on on-the-job training, mentoring, or job-shadowing opportunities, and winning political favour rather than demonstrating skills and expertise has become the norm (Chelechele, 2009; Franks, 2015). It is patently clear that the public sector’s agenda will not succeed if public servants are not skilled enough to do their jobs.

### **3.5.3 The plague of corruption in South Africa's public service**

South Africa is experiencing epidemic levels of corruption in its public service (Franks, 2015; Kroukramp, 2008; Masiloane & Dintwe, 2014; Sindane, 2009). It has been one of South Africa's most crippling societal ills, resulting in injustice, inefficiencies, a deep cynicism and lack of public trust in government, the wastage of public resources and taxpayers' money, the discouragement of enterprise development, political instability, and opportunistically repressive and constraining government policies (Pillay, 2004). Almost every day, newspaper headlines bring this scourge to the fore, colouring the public's perceptions of government, and undermining the democratic process in the country. It is certainly a key variable underpinning both the service delivery problems and public sector skills gaps explained above. Sindane (2009) explains that the "...public administrative culture that emerged promoted regime values to the detriment of the values of the broader population" (p. 341).

With the transition to democracy, those who were previously marginalised during apartheid were provided with the opportunity to lead change in the country's economy. As the complexity of the country's changes became apparent, many government officials and politicians took advantage of the loopholes that presented themselves during this time, and 'lined their own pockets' with public funds, "...thereby undermining and ridiculing democracy and government, fuelling crime, poverty and associated evils" (Masiloane & Dintwe, 2014, p. 185). Corrupt procurement processes, stemming from the apartheid regime's collusion with the private sector, has also provided the loopholes that have enticed new public servants to carry out corrupt practices (Franks, 2015). New policies have also been opportunistically interpreted in terms of how they can serve personal interests. Furthermore, incompetent managers have been hiring incompetent employees, further feeding the skills gap and cycle of favouritism and nepotism

(Franks, 2015). Franks (2015) states that, “In the euphoria for the new South Africa not many predicted the poor level of service, or the greed and avarice that South Africa has witnessed’ (p. 242).

### **3.6 South Africa’s Public Sector Reputation Hinges on its Employees**

As far back as 1995, the ‘White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service’ painted a picture of the changes required to transform the mindset of public servants to equip them to function as officials who are committed to public service (Nengwekhulu, 2009). This was followed by the ‘White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery’ in 1997, which outlined what came to be known as the ‘Batho Pele’ (‘People First’) principles of service delivery. These principles articulated the customer-centricity required in the public sector, covering consultation, service standards, access to service delivery, courtesy, provision of information, openness and transparency, redress, and value for money (Kroukamp, 2001; Masango & Mutukana, 2014; Nengwekhulu, 2009). Increasingly, there are greater demands being placed on public servants and a need for more professionalism in the public sector (Theletsane, 2013).

However, it is evident that the vision for the ‘new public servant’ in South Africa has not become a reality, primarily because many of the transformation imperatives set out in this regard were designed for implementation in a “normal society” (Nengwekhulu, 2009, p. 348). As elucidated in Section 3.5, South Africa’s public service has been ravaged by a legacy of dysfunction, one that will take much more time to remedy than originally anticipated.

Nengwekhulu (2009) describes how the public sector in South Africa is still organised according to the Weberian model of public bureaucracy in its “hierarchical rigidity, impersonality and mechanical human interactions” (p. 346), which significantly contradicts the

essence and philosophy of Batho Pele. Skills shortages, a bureaucratic work ethic, and the “impersonality without a humane face” (Nengwekhulu, 2009, p. 353) have not only compromised interactions with the public, but also the internal culture of public sector organisations. Nepotism, ineffective management, poor teamwork, unfocused attraction and retention mechanisms, suboptimal performance management and political interference by political principals in the running of certain departments have contributed to a poor public sector reputation in South Africa (Naidoo, 2012; Nengwekhulu, 2009; Sindane, 2008). These matters have certainly impacted the motivation levels and commitment of public sector employees in South Africa. In this regard, Pillay (2004) states that this has extended to the “motivation to remain honest” (p. 589), where public sector employees use “public office for private gain” (p. 589).

Public servants who do not believe in their leadership, and who therefore have a compromised sense of commitment, impede the progress of plans and positive developments in the public sector (Fourie, 2005; Harisalo & Stenvall, 2003; Mafunisa, 2013). The political achievements of leaders in public service are not enough to truly engage the hearts and minds of employees. They need to also display the vision and competence to take the organisation forward (Harisalo & Stenvall, 2003; Koma, 2010; Kroukamp, 2008). Caruana, Ramaseshan and Ewing (1997) also find that the responsiveness dimension is very important in public sector organisations as those who display responsiveness seem to cultivate greater affective commitment in their employees. Hence, service delivery impediments can certainly compromise the commitment levels of public sector employees. da Silva and Batista (2007) indicate that government can positively recalibrate the public’s poor perception of it by appealing to employees’ sense of responsiveness and positive attitudes towards those they serve.

It is therefore clear that if employees in government feel connected to and confident about their leadership, including their intentions and their ‘moral compass’, commitment and responsiveness to customers is enabled (da Silva & Batista, 2007; Mafunisa, 2013; Paramusar, 2010). There is no model, framework, or system that can give impetus to public servants taking on the dedicated commitment required to deliver government’s services in a professional and equitable manner. Theletsane (2014) speaks of the strength of “...mind and character arising from internalised value systems. Inherent in those value systems is a clear concept of the public trust, and appreciation of the unique obligation of the public service” (p. 372).

### **3.7 Perceived Organisational Reputation in the Public Sector in South Africa**

Ostensibly, given the historical landscape and tumultuous context of the public sector in South Africa, employees’ organisational identification has potentially been compromised in the public sector due to the challenges outlined in Section 3.5. This has resulted in a complex morass of “ruptures and continuities” (Chipkin & Meny-Gibert, 2012, p. 111) in the creation of the “contemporary South African public sector (organisational culture, norms and values, for example)” (p. 111). The inherited ideological and organisational content, as well as the Weberian model and its work ethic have led public sector employees on a convoluted journey of adaptation within a culture of negative attitudes, conflicting values, corruption, a sense of entitlement amongst some, and poor service delivery (Nengwekhulu, 2009; Sindane, 2008).

It is therefore vital that research is conducted on employees’ perceived organisational reputation in the public sector. To date, there seems to have been just a single, and very recent, study that has examined perceived organisational reputation in the public and non-profit sectors in the United States (Rho et al., 2015). As in Dutton et al.’s 1994 study, Rho et al. (2015) refer to perceived organisational reputation as ‘construed external image’. This study found that

regardless of the public or non-profit sector samples, employees experienced a greater degree of organisational identification (specifically in the form of extra-role effort and reduced absenteeism) when they believed that external clients viewed their organisations positively. The authors surmised that “...construed external image affects the level of perceived organizational identity because employees are social actors who interact with others inside and outside of the organization and may perceive themselves through the impressions of others” (p. 429).

Tangentially, there appears to be just one, and also recent, African study of employees’ attitudes and behaviours being influenced by how positively their organisation’s reputation is perceived. In Otchere-Ankrah, Tenakwah and Tenakwah’s (2016) study of MTN Ghana Limited and Vodafon Ghana Limited, they found that the reputation of these organisations impacted employees’ level of commitment and loyalty to these organisations. As simply put by Otchere-Ankrah et al. (2016), “Employees stay longer to work harder for companies that are liked” (p. 67).

While both studies cited are relevant to the current study, the first by Rho et al. (2015) has an international, ‘developed’ country lens as its findings are anchored to the vastly different socio-cultural context of the United States. Furthermore, it combines the public and non-profit sectors and although these sectors share commonalities in terms of a sense of civic responsibility, they do also possess different drivers, structures and characters. Hence, the study is not applicable to the current research context in South Africa’s public sector. However, Rho et al.’s (2015) study is prescient of the future direction that research on perceived organisational reputation needs to take, as emphasised by Harding (2015), who provides commentary on their study, “Organizations need to reaffirm their civic purpose. Organizations that create public value



and provide effective public service that makes a difference will attract and retain the next generation of public servants” (p. 432).

The second study (Otchere-Ankrah et al., 2016) originated in Ghana and therefore provides a necessary African, ‘developing’ country angle, however, the notion of perceived organisational reputation does not surface in the overt fashion that the current study advocates. Furthermore, the private sector milieu limits its relevance to the current study’s aims. The unique and current tumult and challenges that post-colonial South Africa faces in its public sector necessitates a sharper, more localised focus on perceived organisational reputation.

More change lies ahead for South Africa with the significant, watershed moment in the recent 2016 Government Elections where the ruling party suffered severe losses at the polls in the major urban metros. This change hinges ever so strongly on the calibre, competence and character of the public officials leading the country. As stated by Justice Malala (2016), these elections herald great change as “South Africa has broken the post-colonial narrative. It’s a thrilling turning point” (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/aug/06/anc-elections-south-africa-democracy-zuma>). The study of perceived organisational reputation is therefore highly situationally relevant and powerful given the current climate in the country.

As outlined in Section 2.5.2, it is evident that there is a reciprocal relationship between an organisation’s reputation and its employees (Helm, 2011), and while employees shape outsiders’ perceptions of the organisation, they are concurrently affected and impacted by outsiders’ perceptions – this is called ‘perceived organisational reputation’. As indicated in the ‘National Development Plan’ (National Planning Commission, 2012), turbulence in the public sector has resulted in low staff morale and citizens losing confidence in the state. If the premise is that employees’ connectedness to their public sector organisations has been compromised or

negated by both legacy and democratic transition issues, then these feelings of discontent are shaping outsider's perceptions. These employees are reciprocally impacted by outside perceptions, much of which are also negative.

Examining employees' impressions of how others view their organisation is an important signal of the gap between where employees are and where they need to be in their commitment to playing the crucial transformative and developmental role that the state requires. What is contained in the "mirror" reflecting back to public sector employees, and how do they identify with this (Dutton et al., 1994, p. 249)? Furthermore, as employees are the bedrock of organisational reputations, implementing measures to address the identified gaps will ultimately improve the public sector's reputation in South Africa.

The necessity of the current study is magnified by both the infancy of research on reputation in the public sector *and* the fact that even very rudimentary research on perceived organisational reputation in the public sector has not even really commenced. To date, South African academic research has not tackled public sector employees' perceived organisational reputation. Furthermore, quantitative research, specifically in the form of Likert scales, has dominated the research on perceived organisational reputation (further content on this is provided in Section 5.3 of the methodology chapter), hence providing a one-dimensional view of the 'reciprocity of reputation'.

This is a term that has been woven into the very fabric of the current study to emphasise the dynamic interrelatedness of identity, image and reputation, which is manifested unflinchingly in the concept of perceived organisational reputation. It is evident that a narrative research methodology is better positioned to capture the richness of perceived organisational reputation, more of which is unpacked in the next section. To date, there have been *no* studies on perceived

organisational reputation, globally or locally, using a narrative methodology in either the private or public sectors.

The general aim of this study is to elucidate South African public sector employees' subjective experiences and perceptions of their organisational reputation – the 'perceived organisational reputation'. In the transition from establishing political stability to instituting administrative reforms in line with NPM imperatives, overtly tackling historical 'baggage' in the public sector has never really come to the fore. It is important to develop an understanding of the various stories and motifs currently underpinning employees' perceived organisational reputation to ultimately determine how to develop and solidify their role as custodians and lodestars of public sector reputation. South Africa's public sector employees are pivotal to ensuring that its government develops a positive reputation. The insights yielded from this research could be potentially beneficial for policy makers and leadership in the public sector. Moreover, the hope is that this work can contribute to practical and sustainable solutions in the public sector in South Africa.

The specific research questions posed in this study are as follows:

- What are the emerging and recurring themes across narratives in public sector employees' accounts of their perceived organisational reputation?
- What are the specific and unique stories that emerge from public sector employees' accounts of their perceived organisational reputation as the 'voices' within each narrative are explored?
- How has public sector employees' perceived organisational reputation shaped their organisational identification?

### 3.8 The Centrality of Narratives in the Study of Perceived Organisational Reputation

It is clear from the research questions above that stories play a pivotal role in this research. Narratives are employed to capture the reciprocity of reputation, which is manifested so very lucidly in the concept of perceived organisational reputation. Chapter 5 will further illuminate the narrative frame employed. It is, however, opportune at this stage to highlight that although sparse, there have been researchers who have overtly linked narratives and storytelling to the concept of *organisational reputation*.

Vendelø (1998) describes a Danish software company's efforts to position a new division, and hence bolster its reputation as a "narrative of future performance" (p. 123), thus reiterating that reputation building is produced through narratives. He further states that "...in the process of building a reputation, an organization engages in a kind of identity making as it attempts to influence relevant elements of its environment to perceive itself and its environment in a particular way" (p. 128). In his study of the reputation-narratives of the Salvation Army in Australia, Middleton (2009) underscored the importance of narrative analysis as an important means of studying reputation as "organizational narrative is a key artifact of corporate reputation" (p. 146).

Aula and Mantere (2013), in a similar vein, indicate that "reputation should also be studied as narratives among stakeholders: their stories, anecdotes, and other discursive elements regarding the organization" (p. 347) and "all that is known about an organization's reputation is by nature symbolic; it is present in narratives" (p. 342). Mittins, Abratt and Christie (2011) conducted what seems to be the only South African study that links organisational reputation with storytelling. In their investigation of Nashua Mobile, a telecommunications company, they

found that the various stories shared by employees of the company were imbued with descriptions that resonated with elements from Schwaiger's (2004) measurement tool, which outlined 27 items underpinning corporate reputation. <sup>1</sup>There have, however, been *no* studies that have employed narratives in researching *perceived organisational reputation* thereby representing a significant gap in academia that this study will aim to plug. Furthermore, there are no studies that have employed narratives in studies of either organisational reputation *or* perceived organisational reputation in the public sector, thereby solidifying the further contribution of this study. In this study, narratives are unapologetically foregrounded.

### 3.9 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter evidenced how South Africa's current public sector woes require committed employees to find a way forward. The complex interrelatedness of perceived organisational reputation where employees shape outsiders' perceptions, *but are also concurrently shaped by them*, requires closer attention in South Africa's public sector.

The baggage of the past continues to spread its tentacles through the public service. It will therefore take a resolute and committed workforce to counter these systemic ills. These ideas informed, and flowed into the research questions and aims, which were then articulated.

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<sup>1</sup> Schwaiger (1994) operationalised 27 items based on the following criteria:

Quality of employees; Quality of management; Financial performance; Quality of products and services; Market leadership; Customer orientation; Attractiveness; Social responsibility; Ethical Behavior; Reliability; Fair attitude towards competitors; Transparency and openness; and Credibility.

## CHAPTER 4—THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF PERCEIVED ORGANISATIONAL REPUTATION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the dominant theoretical frameworks underpinning the concept of perceived organisational reputation, Social Identity Theory and Stakeholder Theory. While both have their merits, they are insufficient in capturing the dialogical complexity inherent in perceived organisational reputation. Hence, it is proposed that Bakhtin's Theory of the Dialogical Self, while wholly unexplored in the context of perceived organisational reputation, is a powerful complementary theory, particularly in the context of South Africa's public sector context.

### 4.1 Social Identity Theory

A vast body of work related to organisational identification has been informed by Social Identity Theory [SIT] (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). SIT purports that individuals classify both themselves and others into social categories. These are based on various schemas such as organisational membership, gender, race, and religious affiliation (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

This social classification achieves two goals: firstly, it serves as a means for the individual to cognitively order their environment to define *others*. Secondly, this social classification allows the individual to locate and define *themselves* within this environment (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As indicated by Ashforth and Mael (1989), "Social identification, therefore, is the perception of oneness with or belongingness to some human aggregate" (p. 21). It is similar to

the identification with another person as there is a “social referent,” such as the relationship that one has with one’s parents, or even a “reciprocal role relationship,” such as the one between a husband and wife (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 22). In the context of organisational identification, “The individual’s organization may provide one answer to the question, ‘Who am I?’” (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 22), and as organisations are social groups, they present their employees the opportunity “...to connect to something bigger than their *self*, potentially to address their need for belonging, prestige and attractiveness” (Mishra, 2013, p. 222). Employees then use this association with the organisation to fulfill their desire for self-esteem (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Hence, a key theoretical assumption of SIT is that the individual identifies with certain social categories, partly to enhance self-esteem. Therefore, the attributes of the collective of which one is a part of is instrumental in one’s self-definition. Perceptions of a strong social identity typically involve a powerful affective component, namely, feelings of pride in being a member of the organisation, and perceptions of being recognised or acknowledged through this positive association. As such, “Through social identification, he or she perceives him or herself as psychologically intertwined with the fate of the group, as sharing a common destiny and experiencing its successes and failures” (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p. 105).

‘Metastereotypes’ is a term used to define the impressions that members of an in-group expect members of an out-group to hold about the in-group (Helm, 2013; Owuamalam & Zagefka, 2011; Vorauer, Main & O’Connell, 1988). If negative metastereotypes surface during an encounter between the two groups, it is likely that members of the in-group will distance themselves from it in order to diminish feelings of psychological strain associated with this identification (Helm, 2013; Owuamalam & Zagefka, 2011; Vorauer et al., 1988). Owuamalam

and Zagefka (2011) state that, “Because people strive for positive regard from others, it is conceivable that members would ‘cut-off’ or distance the self from group memberships that cannot contribute positively to their self-view” (p. 529). Hence, SIT propogates that employees will disengage from groups that cannot enhance their sense of self-worth. The comparative nature of social identities and organisational membership is therefore very significant as employees’ self-esteem is affected through both positive and negative comparisons with other groups. As stated by Ashforth and Mael (1989) in this regard, “Individuals often cognitively (if not publicly) identify themselves with a winner” (p. 25).

As individuals are motivated by the need for self-enhancement, they tend to be acutely aware of the social standing of the organisation to which they belong, and hence will identify with organisations that bestow positive qualities upon them. Much of the research explicated in Section 2.5.2 on perceived organisational reputation has drawn heavily on SIT as a theoretical anchor (Bartels et al., 2007; Carmeli, 2005; Ciftcioglu, 2010; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Dutton et al., 1994; Helm, 2011; Helm, 2013; Maels & Ashforth, 1992; Mishra, 2013; Smidts et al., 2001; Swider et al., 2011). In the context of perceived organisational reputation, SIT relates to the ‘social currency’ or prestige that one’s organisational membership creates for oneself. As stated by Fuller, Hester, Barnett, Frey, Relyea and Beu (2005), “Prestige reflects the categorical self and is related to the motivation to achieve and maintain a positive social identity” (p. 819).

Helm (2013) indicates that SIT provides a compelling explanation for the “...reputational bonding effects on employees” (p. 543). While I agree with this, it is my firm opinion that although SIT provides a powerful lens through which to view perceived organisational reputation, it is but *one* lens. It thus fails to capture the essence of this research – the reciprocity of reputation, one to which a dialogical theoretical framework is far more highly attuned. SIT



attests to ‘why employees care’ about their organisational reputations. Dialogism, more of which will be outlined in Section 4.3 below, harnesses the complexity of reputation in an organisation and the dynamic, fluid interplay between the ‘inside’ and the outside’. Chapter 5 on methodology, which is inextricably intertwined with Dialogism, the selected theoretical framework of this study, will further expound the reasons for this in greater detail, including why it is a more appropriate framework within the context of South Africa’s public sector.

## **4.2 Stakeholder Theory**

Since the 1970s, Stakeholder Theory has received increasing attention in academic research, but it was Freeman’s seminal work in 1984 (Freeman, 1984, as cited in Carmeli et al., 2006) that created impetus in the area of constituents’ influences on organisations. Stakeholder Theory advocates that the organisation should be analysed from the perspective of the organisation’s key stakeholders (Carmeli et al., 2006; Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Driscoll & Crombie, 2001; Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997; Verbeke & Tung, 2013).

According to Stakeholder Theory, “Firm constituents (stakeholders) are individuals or groups that hold legitimate interests in the firm’s activities. These constituents maintain relationships with the firm; they both affect and are affected by its behaviors” (Carmeli et al., 2006, p.93). According to Donaldson and Preston (1995), Stakeholder Theory is a significant departure from the ‘input-output model’ where “...investors, employees, and suppliers are depicted as contributing inputs, which the ‘black box’ of the firm transforms into outputs for the benefit of customers” (p. 68). Contrary to this view, Stakeholder Theory advocates that *all* constituencies of an organisation aim to receive benefits from the organisation, and not necessarily at the expense of one stakeholder group over another. Stakeholder Theory “...views the corporation as an organizational entity through which numerous and diverse participants

accomplish multiple, and not always entirely congruent purposes” (Donaldson & Preston, 1995, p.70). Furthermore, as emphasised by Verbeke and Tung (2013), “These actors forge enduring and ongoing ties of strategic importance with the firm that can contribute to its competitive advantage in the long term” (p. 529).

Fombrun and Shanley (1990) view reputation “...as the outcome of a competitive process in which firms signal their key characteristics to constituents to maximize their social status” (p. 234). As such, an organisation transmits signals to its various stakeholder groups, “Just as firms compete for customers, so also do they vie for reputational status” (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990, p. 234). Hence, this signaling is a significant competitive activity as stakeholders then interpret and assess these signals on the basis of their ability to satisfy their needs.

There have been very few studies that have overtly positioned Stakeholder Theory as a central theoretical framework in studies of perceived organisational reputation. It would, however, be remiss not to acknowledge that it certainly is a latent theoretical framework in almost *all* studies of organisational reputation, given the centrality of stakeholders to organisational reputation. As explained in Section 2.2, stakeholder management is, after all, the very nexus of organisational functioning, and while organisational members may not be explicit in their language around ‘stakeholder theory’, “...the vast majority of them apparently adhere in practice to one of the central tenets of the stakeholder theory, namely, that their role is to satisfy a wider range of stakeholders, not simply the share-owners” (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; p. 75).

The research underpinned by Stakeholder Theory ranges from broader and more encompassing definitions of stakeholders, to narrower, instrumental perspectives of stakeholders within the organisation’s operating environment (Carmeli et al., 2006; Driscoll & Crombie, 2001; Illia & Lurati, 2006; Mitchell et al., 1997). Within the narrow, instrumental perspective of

Stakeholder Theory, stakeholders are defined as “...those groups or individuals that are in a mutually dependent, risk-based, or exchange relationship with a firm” (Driscoll & Crombie, 2001, p. 443). According to Driscoll and Crombie (2001), “This approach to stakeholder management involves identifying and prioritizing stakeholder issues based on managerial perceptions of stakeholder power” (p. 443).

Research on perceived organisational reputation conducted through the lens of Stakeholder Theory has endorsed this narrow view of stakeholders in identifying *employees* as a key constituent, which is pivotal to organisational performance (Carmeli et al., 2006; Illia & Lurati, 2006; Pruzan, 2001; Riordan et al., 1997). As outlined in Section 2.5.1 on employees being the bedrock of organisational reputations, and in Section 2.5.2 where this centrality of the employee base in organisations is clearly manifested in perceived organisational reputation, it is evident from a narrow, instrumental, Stakeholder Theory viewpoint that employees are a key constituent.

Yet again, as in SIT, Stakeholder Theory presents a valuable, complementary theoretical perspective on perceived organisational reputation. The reciprocity of reputation could not, of course, be manifested in its complex dynamism without stakeholders being core to its conception. Those stakeholders, both inside and outside the organisation, enable this reciprocity. Stakeholder Theory therefore identifies the key protagonists influencing the dynamic interplay amongst identity, image and reputation.

However, without a dialogical conception, the opportunity is lost to harness the richness of the various ‘voices’ that surface from these stakeholders to create meaning systems. We are left with a somewhat sterile view of stakeholders interacting with and within an organisation. Stakeholder Theory is therefore valuable, but as in SIT, it fails to capture the essence of this

study. A dialogical theoretical framework is thus more apt in this regard for capturing a more multifaceted view of ‘voice’ rather than just ‘stakeholders’, which is intrinsic to this study of a ‘storied system’. Further detail on this aspect will follow in Chapter 5.

### **4.3 Bakhtin’s Dialogism and the ‘Dialogical Self’**

The construct of the ‘dialogical self’ provides a robust theoretical anchor for this study. ‘Dialogism’ is a term that arose from the writings of literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, who challenged the notion of self-contained, isolated individuality (Hermans, 2001; Mkhize, 2003). As stated by Boje (1995), “Organizational life is more indeterminate, more differentiated, more chaotic, than it is simple, systematic, monological and hierarchical” (p. 1001). From this angle, the Cartesian, Newtonian ethos, which endorses a single truth and unitary reality along linear, rational, orderly and positivistic paths, is untenable (Ahmad, 2009). As such, our monological, intellectual traditions are challenged. Shotter (1992) states that in the traditional, scientific orientation, “We treat what we are studying as an object of thought in order to form theories to guide our further, deliberate actions in regard to it” (p. 18). Bakhtin, alternatively, considered dialogism to be central to intellectual progress, as dialogism “...leads us more toward a focus on people's social practices, rather than on what is supposed to be occurring within their individual heads” (Shotter & Billig, 1996, p. 13). Hence, Bakhtin indicated that:

The single adequate form for verbally expressing authentic human form is the open-ended dialogue. Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. (Bakhtin, 1984 as cited in Shotter, 1992, p. 18)

According to Hermans (2001), “Dialogue implies spatially located interlocutors involved in question and answer, and in agreement and disagreement. Even in purely imaginary dialogues, the self functions as a self-space with a variety of positions” (p. 259). The dialogical self is a more apt and solid anchor for this study as it conceives of the self “in terms of a multiplicity of positions among which dialogical relations can develop” (Hermans, 2001, p. 243). This idea of an “extended self” (Hermans, 2001, p. 245) contrasts strongly with the Cartesian view of the self, which posits hermetic boundaries between the self and the body, and between self and other (Ahmad, 2009; Hermans, 2001; Hermans, Kempen & van Loon, 1992).

Bakhtin posited that meaning and knowledge emanate from dialogical, communicative processes and from the dynamic interdependence of actors located in space, time and context (Grossen & Orvig, 2011; Mkhize, 2003). According to Shotter (1992), Bakhtin reminds us that “...we live in a way that is responsive both to our own sense of our own position and to the positions of those who are ‘other than’ ourselves, in the semiotically created ‘world’ in which we are ‘placed’” (p. 14).

Speakers are therefore always in dialogue with each other, “...speaking in a certain type of ‘voice’, continually responding to each other’s utterances” (Shotter, 1992, p. 10-11). Bakhtin’s basic unit of language is the ‘utterance’, and this *speaking of words* becomes a complex social process, which “...should primarily be seen both as *doing* and as *expressing* very precise and specific things just at the time of their utterance: in their use, they are individual, social, and ideological all at the same time” (Shotter & Billig, 1998, p. 14). Therefore, “Each word tastes of the context in which it has lived its socially charged life” (Bakhtin, 1981, as cited in Shotter & Billig, 1998, p. 15). Utterances are therefore always engaged in a relationship with other utterances (Beech, 2008). Initially, the utterances of others may be “alien words” (Beech,

1998, p.55), yet over time they become the utterances that one co-opts into one's own words, therefore perpetuating a kind of historical expression, as "...any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances" (Bakhtin, 1986 as cited in Salo, 1998, p. 83).

The dialogical self is inherently social – and is not seen from the perspective that an individual enters a social situation as a 'bounded entity' and then begins to engage and interact with others. Rather, it is the idea that other people occupy positions in an unbounded, permeable, and multi-voiced self. As stated by Hermans (2001), "The other may be partly the product of my imagination, closely intertwined with the 'actual' other and can be even completely imaginary" (p. 250). The dialogical self is therefore not confined to internal voices within individuals, but coexists with the myriad of external voices within one's social milieu.

In arguing for a dialogical conception of the self, there is the understanding that stories have been pervasive as people have related them and listened to them in all cultures at all times (Hermans et al., 1992). According to Ahmad (2009), "In dialogism, the production of consciousness (living conversation) is something people do together rather than the work of individual possession" (p. 272). These practices have enabled people to "...arrive at an understanding and ordering of the world and the self" (Hermans et al., 1992, p. 23). The self as a "dialogical narrator" is thus "spatially organized and embodied [and] social, with the other not outside but in the self-structure, resulting in a multiplicity of dialogically interacting selves" (Hermans et al., 1992, p. 23). Therefore, "Contrasts, oppositions and negotiations are part of a distributed, multi-voiced self" (Hermans, 2001, p. 245).

Bakhtin ushered in the metaphor of the 'polyphonic novel', incorporating a multitude of characters to illustrate the dynamic, heterogeneous and multi-voiced characteristics of the self (Ahmad, 2009; Barry & Elmes, 1997; Hermans, 2001; Mkhize, 2003). As described by Hermans

et al. (1992), the polyphonic novel "...permits one individual to live in a multiplicity of worlds, with each world having its own author telling a story relatively independent of the authors of the other worlds" (p. 28). Furthermore, as the dialogical self encompasses relatively autonomous 'I' positions, "The 'I' in one position can agree, disagree, understand, misunderstand, oppose, contradict, question, and even ridicule the 'I' in another position" (Hermans et al., 1992, p. 29).

Within this polyphony, there resides a unique 'time and space' orientation (Hermans, 2001). As stated by Hermans et al. (1992), "Moving through space and time, the self can imaginatively occupy a number of positions that permit mutual dialogical relations" (p. 23). Each character, or 'I' in the story therefore has the opportunity to possess a particular stance, as they dialogically exchange information about their respective 'Me's', resulting in a "complex, narratively structured self" (Hermans, 2001, p. 248).

#### **4.3.1 The dialogical self in organisational life**

The evolution of organisations in society has challenged "...old markers of learning where ordered certainty and predictability" are the rules of the game (Ahmad, 2009, p. 270). The construct of the dialogical self has emerged as a factor that eradicates notions of a single and unitary truth, which is perpetuated by a bounded, isolated and rational individual. As stated by Boje (1995), "The problem with mechanistic and organic models is that they do not conceptualize people as thinking and discoursing beings" (p. 1029).

Polyphony, so ubiquitous in organisational life, means that there is an enhanced focus on the multifacetedness of relations within organisations rather than just narrowly focusing on individual effectiveness (Ahmad, 2009). It also means that dissent and disagreements emerge as 'normal' and there is a reduced focus on creating monological and unitary ways of thinking (Ahmad, 2009).

Researchers have approached the study of dialogical selves in organisations with much creativity. These studies are underpinned by the understanding that “In organizations people construct its reality through conversations, and that realities exist in the ‘reported’ words, phrases and sentences of the management and in ‘coffee table talks’” (Ahmad, 2009, p. 271).

Through their juxtaposition of varying organisational stories, Barry and Elmes (1997) position the importance of polyphonic strategic narratives that generate dialogical understandings and perspectives in organisations. Boje (1991b) also endorses a dialogical stance in indicating that organisational members’ telling of stories allows them to “...supplement individual memories with institutional memory” (p. 106). This is aligned with the concept of the self being “...a dynamic multiplicity of relatively autonomous ‘I’ positions in an imaginal landscape” (Hermans et al., 1992, p. 28). Boje (1991b) further articulates that, “Both teller and listener are sending cues to manage how much of the story is told, how much is left to the imagination and what interpretation is applied. This also is management of sense making” (p. 124).

Boje (1995) illustrates a polyphonic narrative strategy that encompasses plurivocality and multiple perspectives in his depiction of ‘Tamara’, a theatre production where numerous characters unfold various storylines for a wandering audience who can choose which stories to follow. In so doing, Boje (1995) demonstrates “...a plurivocal (multiple story interpretation) theory of competing organizational discourses” (p. 997) where stories become “...part of the interpretative struggle and everyday sense-making” (p. 1030). Both the storytellers and audience are co-producers of each story as multiple stories are simultaneously played out at numerous sites. ‘Tamara’ is an apt metaphor for the dialogical, storytelling organisation.

The dialogical storytelling organisation is also unsurfaced and evidenced in other studies and writings. Backer’s (2008) study, for example, explores “...the narrative battles over Shell’s



organisational identity” in its transition from an ‘oil company’ to an ‘energy company’ (p. 42). Bryant and Cox (2004) tackle how employees construct change through their ‘conversion stories’ in an organisation, and the social and historical context within which these acts are embedded (p. 578). Carlsen (2006) addresses “becoming” in an organisation, which is viewed as “...a stream of experiences and imaginations upon these experiences, in a set of dialogues bumping up against each other and potentially reinforcing one another, thus constituting strong fields of collective meaning and engagement” (p. 145).

The Voice-Centred Relational Method is also highly consistent with the dialogical conception of self, specifically in terms of the method’s emphasis on polyphony, voice, and the inherently social nature of the self, as advocated by Bakhtin. The multiple readings of the interview transcripts allow the researcher to tune their ear to the polyphonic voice and the multi-layered narratives of the participants, as there are many voices that both comprise and shape a person’s expressed experiences. This will be further illustrated in Chapter 5.

#### **4.4 Summary of the Chapter**

This section has evidenced that in the context of perceived organisational reputation, Bakhtin’s Theory of the Dialogical Self is a more robust theory relative to the more traditional theoretical frameworks of SIT and Stakeholder Theory. There are numerous stories to tell in organisational life, reflecting the multiple actors that comprise it, as well as their social origins and cultural positioning. To date, no research study on organisational reputation has utilised a dialogical framework to explore storied selves. Hence, this study provides a novel take on a pertinent concept in South Africa’s public sector.

## CHAPTER 5—METHOD

This chapter describes the method adopted in this study. It begins with an overview of both the ontological and epistemological foundations of the study, thereby solidifying the appropriateness of an interpretive, hermeneutic, phenomenological approach. The philosophical underpinnings of this approach are briefly reviewed alongside the important constitutive elements of the narrative frame utilised in the study. Bakhtin's dialogism is also discussed, which has contributed greatly to, and is highly consistent with the method used in this study – the Voice-Centred Relational Method. The application of this method is then presented, followed by a discussion of reliability and validity in qualitative research. Finally, ethical considerations are broached.

### 5.1 Research Design

In order to address the research questions posited, it is necessary to position a coherent research design that provides a credible and clear guide for action (Durrheim, 2006; Goldberg & Allen, 2015). Sound social research requires a design before the processes of data collection and its analysis can begin (de Vaus, 2001; Flick, von Kardoff & Steinke, 2004; Goldberg & Allen, 2015). This ensures that the evidence obtained during the research process enables the researcher to answer the research questions in both a convincing *and* compelling manner. Research design refers to how an enquiry is structured, and the sequence of decisions that are deliberated in the research process (de Vaus, 2001; Flick et al., 2004). As stated by de Vaus (2001), "It is a logical matter rather than a logistical one" (p. 16). In order to demonstrate this logic in the research design, it is imperative to examine the ontological and epistemological foundations of the study.

### 5.1.1 Ontological and epistemological foundations

Viewing this study through its ontological and epistemological lenses provides sound impetus for the research decisions made throughout the research process, including those related to the selected methodology. As stated by Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2006), “Ontology specifies the nature of reality that is to be studied, and what can be known about it” (p. 6), while “...epistemology specifies the nature of the relationship between the researcher (knower) and what can be known” (p. 6).

In this study, the questions that the researcher sought to explore were located firmly within the realm of ‘lived experience,’ and within the “...internal reality of subjective experience” (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006, p. 6). Furthermore, “From the assumption about the constant everyday creation of a shared world, there emerges the character of the process and the reflexivity and recursivity of social reality” (Flick et al., 2004, p. 7). The point of view of the participants in this study is paramount, hence there is a greater focus on the social milieu, and the “...processes, meaning patterns and structural features” (Flick et al., 2004, p. 3) that were brought to the fore.

Qualitative research presupposes a subjective construction of reality, and views “...the research process as a constructive act” (Flick et al., 2004, p. 8). According to Eisner (2001), this constructive element is much akin to the artistic world in terms of the “nuance, particularity, emotion and perceptual freshness” (p. 137) that characterises qualitative research. Furthermore, like in the arts, “Form matters” (p. 138) and “...content and form cannot be separated” (p. 138). An interpretive-relativist ontology is therefore embraced, with an overt rejection of a positivist ontology (Bhati, Hoyt & Huffman, 2014; Draper, 2004; Eisner, 2001; Smith, 2004; Terre

Blanche & Durrheim, 2006; Watts, 2014) that advocates a “stable”, “external”, and “law-like” reality (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006, p. 6).

Having examined the ontological underpinnings of the study, it is now necessary to turn to its epistemological foundations. Given the approach to the phenomena investigated, a greater sense of openness and involvement is typically imparted by the researcher as meaning is co-produced with participants (Bhati et al., 2014; Flick et al., 2004; Sammel, 2003; Watts, 2014). Hence, there is the joint creation of social meanings that emerge from social interaction, and as stated by Flick et al. (2004), “The epistemological principle of qualitative research is the understanding of complex relationships – rather than explanation by isolation of a single relationship such as ‘cause-and-effect’” (p. 8). There is a constant and pervasive self-reflection on the part of the researcher throughout the research process, while simultaneously attending to the participants’ diversity of opinions. This stance is pivotal to the process, and rather than the researcher being viewed as a potential source of disruption, he or she is intrinsic to the research outcomes. Hence, the conception of the researcher as a detached, clinical, uninvolved ‘spectator’, as in objectivist epistemologies, is obliterated.

As stated by Terre Blanche, Kelly and Durrheim (2006), the researcher becomes “...the primary instrument for both collecting and analysing the data” (p. 276), and as such “...subjectivity is not considered the enemy of truth, but the very thing that makes it possible for us to understand personal and social realities empathically” (p. 277). Sammel (2003) extends this idea in explaining that “...the researcher takes on the role of co-learner and seeks to be educated by the people involved in the study” (p. 161).

It is therefore clear that qualitative research is “concerned with the quality or nature of human experiences and what these phenomena mean to individuals” (Draper, 2004, p. 642), and

“the study of the shared meaning of experience of a phenomenon for several individuals” (McCaslin & Scott, 2003, p. 449). According to Fossey, Harvey, McDermott and Davidson (2002), these studies “aim to elicit participants’ views of their lives as portrayed in their stories, and so to gain access to their experiences, feelings and social worlds” (p. 727). This type of research focuses on studying people in ‘natural’ contexts, and is open-ended, flexible, and highly attuned to new insights that emerge throughout the research process (Draper, 2004; Fossey, et al., 2002).

One characteristic of qualitative research’s emergent, cyclical, and iterative process is the notion that sampling, data collection, analysis and interpretation are related to, and interwoven with each other (Fossey et al., 2002; Watts, 2014). Eisner (2001) describes the practice of qualitative research as follows:

Qualitative researchers pay careful attention to highly nuanced qualities in both their uptake and their output, they are focused on cases, that is, on the particular; they use forms of communication that are intended to do more than tell, but to show, that is, to convey a sense or feeling of person or place. (p. 136)

Qualitative research therefore captures the pluralism and dynamism of our social fabric (Eisner, 2001; Jackson, Drummond & Camara, 2007; Watts, 2014). Social reality is conceived of as the result of contexts and meanings that are co-produced in social interaction. Qualitative research is thus underpinned by the assumption that “reality is created interactively and becomes meaningful subjectively, and that it is transmitted and becomes effective by collective and individual instances of interpretation” (Flick et al., 2004, p.7).

Irrespective of the focus, qualitative research is concerned with “the interpretation of subjective meaning, description of social context and the privileging of lay knowledge” (Fossey

et al., 2002, p. 723). To this end, the research is channeled into three areas: language as a means of understanding communication processes and social interactions; the description and interpretation of the subjective meanings linked to situations; and the building of theories as the data reveals insights, patterns, and connections (Fossey et al., 2002).

### **5.1.2 An interpretive, hermeneutic, phenomenological approach**

Having examined both the ontological (interpretive-relativist) and epistemological (lived experience) foundations of the research, it is evident that these are assumptions closely associated with a phenomenological approach (Annells, 1996; Barton, 2004; Finlay, 2014; Moran, 2000; Sammel, 2003). While characterised and nuanced by numerous diverse philosophers, phenomenology has come to be known as “...a radical, anti-traditional style of philosophising, which emphasises the attempt to get to the truth of matters, to describe phenomena, in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that is as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experiencer” (Moran, 2000, p. 4).

As such, experiential evidence is paramount, and explanations are not to be thrust upon ‘objects of enquiry’ before phenomena have been truly understood, and thus “...the programme of phenomenology sought to reinvigorate philosophy by returning it to the life of the living human subject” (Moran, 2000, p. 4). This study posits a particular strand of phenomenology, namely, an interpretive, hermeneutic phenomenology. While it is impossible to do justice to the vast and complex landscape that is phenomenology, certain key developments in its historical trajectory culminate in a view of how interpretive, hermeneutic phenomenology came into being.

### 5.1.3 Key developments and ideas in interpretive, hermeneutic phenomenology

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), the founder of phenomenology, persevered to create a phenomenological science that espoused a “...cognition of essences rather than of matters of fact” (Annells, 1996, p. 706), as well as “pure consciousness” (p. 706). He also offered methodological guidance for phenomenological research, for example, the epistemological idea of ‘bracketing’ the world to suspend all judgments and preconceived notions “...in order to isolate the central essential features of the phenomena under investigation” (Moran, 2000, p. 11).

Husserl’s student, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) also had a critical role to play in the field of phenomenology as he initiated a series of shifts in Husserl’s work, and:

This journey, with various turns and refinements, led Heidegger to move from the epistemological emphasis of Husserl to an emphasis on the ontological foundations of the understanding which is reached through being-in-the-world’, and thus to what is postulated as the pivotal notion of human everyday existence *Dasein*. (Annells, 1996, p. 706)

‘Dasein’ introduced a new meaning of ‘being human’ and drew attention to the notion that the person and the world co-create each other. Therefore, “Man makes sense of his world from within his existence and not while detached from it” (Annells, 1996, p. 706).

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), through his encounters with Heidegger, drew fervently on his hermeneutics, that is, “...the art of interpretation or understanding” (Moran, 2000, p. 248) and made hermeneutics key to the study of philosophy itself. He was further influenced by Wilhelm Dilthey’s work on the history of hermeneutics, and his ideas of ‘verstehen’ – understanding (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). A central component of Gadamer’s hermeneutics is that “understanding and interpretation are indissolubly bound up with each

other” (Annells, 1996, p. 707). For Gadamer, phenomenology and hermeneutics were also inextricably tied to each other as both were concerned with the process of how meaning emerges (Moran, 2000). His work also advocated a departure from earlier hermeneutic projects that sought to anchor a methodology for the interpretation of meaning. Instead, he revealed the “openness and curiosity” that dialogue offers, thereby elevating the ontology of lived experience and being-in-the-world (Sammel, 2003, p. 159).

However, Gadamer added another layer to this conception, the idea of ‘linguisticity’ or *Sprachlichkeit* in which humans encounter the world, and live in it, through language (Dowling, 2004; Moran, 2000). As stated by Gadamer, “Language is the medium of the hermeneutic experience” (Gadamer, 1975 as cited in Moran, 2000, p. 248), meaning that understanding is achieved through language, specifically through conversation and dialogue, where the authenticity of experience comes to the fore through one’s openness with another person. This linguisticity of understanding is thrown into stark relief by the following quote:

To understand a text is to come to understand oneself in a kind of dialogue. This contention is confirmed by the fact that the dealing with a text yields understanding only when what is said in the text begins to find expression in the interpreter’s own language. Interpretation belongs to the essential unity of understanding. (Gadamer, 1975, as cited in Annells, 1996, p. 707)

Furthermore, the art of understanding is exemplified by the pervasive metaphor of the ‘hermeneutic circle’, which is a philosophy of how humans understand their experiences, and is conceived as a dynamic and circular movement between the part and whole of a text as one seeks understanding (Barton, 2004; Finlay, 2014; Kelly, 2006b). As stated by Barton (2004), “Through dialogue each person gives up a little of the self to the other and the new horizon that is co-



created becomes a piece of the interpretive process, a hermeneutical circle of understanding” (p. 521). The hermeneutic circle is also integrally linked with ‘historical consciousness’ and the ‘fusion of horizons’ (Annells, 1996; Finlay, 2014; Moran, 2000). Gadamer built further on Heidegger’s historicity of *Dasein* when he focused on the historical consciousness in the understanding and interpretation of text, and the fusion of the horizons of the past, present, and future (Annells, 1996; Dowling, 2004; Moran, 2000). The “...fusion of the horizons of the interpreter and the text” (Annells, 1996, p. 707) is also a significant concept in the dialogic interplay that is the hermeneutic circle. Sammel (2003) clarifies that:

As people interact within a particular historical horizon of tradition Gadamer insists all interpretations are anchored in our social and individual histories. These histories or pre-understandings enter into any dialogical situation with us for they serve as the foundations for our values, assumptions and relationships. (p. 158)

Meaning is thus always open to interpretation, is shared through interactions and is highly situational, “Meaning, to Gadamer, is not stable; it shimmers” (Sammel, 2003, p. 158). It is this very sentiment that renders the data analytic method used in this study, the Voice-Centred Relational Method (referred to hereafter as the ‘Relational Method’), highly appropriate and synergistic. Although more fully explicated in Section 5.4, it is prudent to briefly introduce a few salient points about the method to enable a more fully integrated view by the end of this chapter. The Relational Method involves a set of three or more sequential readings of an interview text, and these readings then inform each other and are executed from different ‘vantage points’, thereby tapping into the meanings that are yielded from participants’ narrative accounts of their relationship with themselves as individuals, their relationships with other people, and their relationships within the broader socio-cultural milieu (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Mauthner &

Doucet, 1998). As stated by Mauthner and Doucet (2003), “Human beings are viewed as interdependent rather than independent and as embedded in a complex web of intimate and larger social relations” (p. 422). In so doing, participants’ ‘voices’ are heard from a number of different perspectives.

The hermeneutic circle of understanding is starkly evident in this method as the researcher guides the participant through these various perspectives in the dialogical coaction between part and whole. Hopkins (2011) also speaks of the “double hermeneutic circle [where] the participants try to make meaningful sense of their own world while the researcher tries to interpret meaningfully the participants’ own interpretation” (p. 714). The phenomenological themes of recursivity, historicity, the fusion of horizons, and the essence of lived experience are all emphasised in the Relational Method. Furthermore, the linguisticity of understanding, which is so ardently perpetuated by Gadamer, is a central feature of the method. If language, conversation and dialogue are the mediums through which understanding is yielded, then the *narrative frame* is of the utmost importance. The narrative interview is a key feature of the Relational Method. The next section sheds some light on the narrative frame and its methodological significance and contribution to the study.

## **5.2 The Narrative Frame**

The narrative impetus was born out of the post-World War surge in humanist approaches, as well as Russian structuralist approaches, and later, French post-structuralist, postmodern, psychoanalytic, and deconstructionist approaches to narrative that challenge traditional positivistic modes of enquiry (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2013). Contemporary narrative enquiry can be positioned as a fusion of various interdisciplinary lenses, approaches and methods

(Chase, 2005). Narrative has over time ‘morphed’ into a ‘portmanteau’ term that is ubiquitous in social research, but also in popular culture (Andrews et al., 2013).

Narrative studies cut across fields as diverse as “literary theory, history, anthropology, drama, art, film, theology, philosophy, psycholinguistics, education, and even aspects of evolutionary biological science” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Narrative research has taken on a rich, complex and multidisciplinary flavour “...perhaps because it focuses on human experience, perhaps because it is a fundamental structure of human experience, and perhaps because it has a holistic quality” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2).

However, these all hinge on “an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them” (Chase, 2005, p. 651). Human beings are conceived to be “storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Studies of narratives therefore elucidate how humans experience life (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

A central tenet of the ‘narrative turn’ is that rather than simply relaying events, narrators construct events through their narratives, and are hence involved in the construction of meaning (Chase, 2005; Riessman, 2000). As stated by Chase (2005), when “someone tells a story, he or she shapes, constructs, performs the self, experience and reality” (p. 657). From this perspective, “situations, organizations and environments are talked into existence” (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 404). Researchers therefore treat oral and written narratives as a form of discourse and meaning-making – as well as a joint production of narrator and listener (Boje, 1991a). In fact, researchers themselves become narrators in the process of interpreting and presenting the narratives analysed (Chase, 2005).

A further noteworthy point is that a narrative is not a simple chronology that details various events over time; a narrative is imbued with the narrator's point of view, and its associated thoughts, interpretations and emotions (Chase, 2005). This is a “discursive, flexible, protean and idiosyncratic process” (Hannabuss, 2000, p. 409). Unlike scientific rhetoric, narrative is concerned with the uniqueness of a vantage point, action or event rather than their generalisable properties. This, however, does not negate researchers' focusing on patterns, similarities and differences across narratives that are created in particular contexts. Stories are, after all, both enabled and constrained by social context, locales and milieus.

Critical to the narrative frame is the conception that narratives provide a passage to both the individual and society, and make it possible to understand the connections that exist between them (Hawkins & Saleem, 2012; Laslett, 1999). Personal narratives are viewed as providing a unique perspective on the intersection of the individual and society, and as stated by Riessman (2005), narratives can “forge connections between personal biography and social structure – the personal and the political” (p. 6). The narrative tradition of ‘taking the other's view’, and its power to forge connections between the personal and the political means that narrative has the potential for positive social change, and a functional, democratic, public life (Chase, 2005). Narrative possibilities for generating new realities therefore mean that it has the inherent potential for social change at any time and place.

### **5.2.1 Narrative research within organisational settings**

The focus on narratives and storytelling has found a prominent place in organisational life. As articulated by Boje (1991a) in his conceptualisation of the “storytelling organisation” (p. 7), stories are “not just something which people tell to others to entertain, nor just something

they do when they communicate. Rather, stories are the blood vessels through which changes pulsate in the heart of organisational life” (p. 8).

Much research is focused on the popular appeal of stories in organisations. These studies focus on the power of shared stories when they are used to create communities in organisations, and how stories can serve as ‘organisational cues’ about shared values, culture and strategies (Bennet & Bennet, 2007; Brady & Haley, 2013). Furthermore, the applicability of stories in scenario planning, business presentations, and positioning and solidifying the gravitas of leaders in organisations is often covered (Denning, 2006; Gargiulo, 2006). As stated by Bennet and Bennet (2007), stories “when carefully selected, they are relevant, meaningful and may have a long organizational life, providing a significant and powerful tool for managers and leaders” (p. 404). However, far from these oftentimes ‘gimmicky’ and overly-commercialised sensibilities that “imply populism and hence a low-brow vulgarity” (Collins, 2013, p. 43) lies the notion that organisational stories serve a sensemaking purpose (Boje, 1991a; Boje, 1991b; Islam, 2013; Weick et al., 2005). According to Boje (1991b), organisations are collective storytelling systems in “which the performance of stories is a key part of members’ sensemaking” (p. 106). Stories are in fact viewed as the “preferred sense-making currency of human relationships (Boje, 1991b, p. 106).

### **5.2.2 Narratives and organisational sensemaking**

From this sensemaking perspective, it would be shortsighted to see stories as mechanisms to achieve managerial control, rather “stories are viewed as narrative resources that individuals use to bring shape and meaning to their own lives” (Collins, 2013, p. 49). The focus is therefore on organisational sensemaking through processes of narrativisation where organisations “enact narratives such that organizational meaning can be managed” (Middleton, 2009, p. 146). As

further elucidated by Weick et al. (2005), the pursuit of meaning in organisations is underpinned by sensemaking that occurs “when a flow of organizational circumstances is turned into words and salient categories [and] organizing itself is embodied in written and spoken texts” (p. 409). To Weick et al. (2005), sensemaking is a matter of “language, talk and communication” (p. 409).

Furthermore, organisations’ identities are said to be constituted by the narratives that their members relate about them. Storytelling therefore plays a crucial role in the creation and preservation of organisational culture (Rosile, Boje, Carlon, Downs & Saylor, 2013). These identity-narratives are stories that are related as organisational members attempt to understand or make sense of the organisations with which they identify (Manuti & Mininni, 2013). According to Manuti and Mininni (2013), “The very fabric of organization is constantly being created and recreated through the elaboration, contestation, and exchange of narratives” (p. 218). Sensemaking is said to be both “self-referential and identity-confirming” as individuals strive to understand and find meaning in their experiences (Hannabuss, 2000, p. 407).

Locating narratives within the context of organisational reputation, and specifically perceived organisational reputation, is adroitly facilitated by adopting this organisational sensemaking position. As articulated by Weick et al. (2005):

From the perspective of sensemaking, who we think we are (identity) as organizational actors shapes what we enact and how we interpret, which affects what outsiders think we are (image) and how they treat us, which stabilizes or destabilizes our identity. Who we are lies importantly in the hands of others, which means our categories for sensemaking lie in their hands. If their images of us change, our identities may be destabilized and our receptiveness to new meanings increase. Sensemaking, filtered through issues of identity,

is shaped by the recipe ‘how can I know who we are becoming until I see what they say and do with our actions?’ (p. 416)

The very notion of ‘perceived organisational reputation’ is inherent in the definition provided above, where through sensemaking, the reciprocity of identity and image come into play, where they mirror and shape each other (Dutton et al., 1994; Helm, 2011; Helm, 2013). The narrative frame, which is underpinned by, and inextricably bound with, an organisational sensemaking foundation thus becomes both a powerful and apt platform to address this study’s research questions within the context of perceived organisational reputation in the public sector in South Africa.

As outlined in Section 3.8, although scant, there have been researchers who have overtly linked narratives and storytelling to the concept of organisational reputation (Aula & Mantere, 2013; Middleton, 2009; Mittins et al., 2011; Vendelø, 1998). There have, however, been *no* studies that have employed narratives in researching perceived organisational reputation. Furthermore, there are no studies that have employed narratives in studies on either organisational reputation or perceived organisational reputation in the public sector.

### **5.3 Measures Used in Research on Perceived Organisational Reputation**

Unequivocally, research on perceived organisational reputation has been dominated by perceptions captured on rating scales (Bartels et al., 2007; Carmeli & Freund, 2002; Carmeli, 2004; Carmeli et al., 2006; Ciftcioglu, 2010; Helm, 2011; Helm, 2013; Mishra, 2013; Smidts et al., 2001). The two most popular rating scales used, the annual Fortune Survey of America’s Most Admired Companies, and the work of Mael and Ashforth (1992), are briefly considered below.

### **5.3.1 Fortune's Survey of America's Most Admired Companies (AMAC)**

Fortune, the U.S. based magazine has been running an annual survey of the 'most admired companies in America' since 1982, and has become the most popular measure of organisational reputation (Baden-Fuller, Ravazzolo & Schweizer, 2000; Bromley, 2002; Caruana, 1997; Clardy, 2012; Ponzi et al., 2011). It has consequently influenced the measurement of perceived organisational reputation. The measurement is a scale based on the ratings of companies, which are obtained predominantly from executives, directors and security analysts who rate a selection of companies on different attributes of corporate success, namely: 'Quality of management'; 'Quality of products and services'; 'Innovativeness'; 'Long-term investment value'; 'Financial soundness'; 'Ability to attract, develop and keep talented people'; 'Responsibility to community and environment'; and 'Wise use of corporate assets' (Caruana, 1997; Ponzi et al., 2011).

There have, however, been various methodological and validity concerns raised about the survey, including a financial halo effect due to target firms being selected on the basis of the size of their revenue, the over-representation of senior managers, directors, and financial analysts in the sample, and the notion that the measure is overly focused on performance and little else (Caruana, 1997; Carmeli & Freund, 2002; Davies et al., 2001; Ponzi et al., 2011).

In their studies on employees' perceived organisational reputation, Carmeli (2004, 2005); Carmeli and Freund (2002); and Helm (2011, 2013) have all utilised scales based on Fortune's Survey of AMAC. Carmeli and Freund (2002) acknowledge the methodological concerns associated with the scale, however, they also note that studies continue to use this scale, thereby extending its validity.



### 5.3.2 The work of Mael and Ashforth (1992)

Mael and Ashforth's (1992) research on organisational identification examined the 'prestige' of the organisation as an antecedent of identification based on the proposition that the more prestigious the organisation is, the greater the boost to self-esteem through identification. They measured 'organisational prestige,' which they defined as "...the degree to which the institution is well regarded" (p. 111) with an 8-item scale.

There is a slight difference in the nuance of this specific definition when compared with this study's definition of 'perceived organisational reputation'. As indicated in Section 2.5.2, it is "...a belief held by members regarding how outsiders view the organisation" (Carmeli & Freund, 2002, p. 51). However, the items in the Mael and Ashforth (1992) rating scale do clearly examine the beliefs of the alumni of a religious college with regard to how they are perceived by outsiders. Questions in the Mael and Ashforth (1992) scale include, "People in my community think highly of [name of school]" (p. 122) and "Alumni of all [conference schools] should be proud to have their children attend [name of school]" (p. 122).

In their studies on employees' perceived organisational reputation, Bartels et al. (2007); Bhattacharya, Rao and Glynn (1995); Carmeli et al. (2006); Ciftcioglu (2010); Mishra (2013); and Smidts et al. (2001) have all used scales based on the one developed by Mael and Ashforth (1992). The items in these scales were adapted given that Mael and Ashforth (1992) used the original scale in the context of alumni *and* employees (Mael, 1988, as cited in Mael & Ashforth, 1992).

### 5.3.3 Criticism of the rating scales for measuring perceived organisational reputation

Unlike the Fortune Survey of AMAC, there seems to be little overt criticism of the Mael and Ashforth method, however, it is evident that both measures would be beset with the types of

critique directed at rating scales in general. Rating scales have been frequently used in quantitative research in psychology, and Likert scales have certainly been a dominant measure (Marczyk, DeMatteo & Festinger, 2005; Ogden & Lo, 2011). This measurement approach aims to quantify a construct, and participants are requested to rate their responses to a construct on a numerical continuum (Marczyk et al., 2005).

Some of the criticisms leveled against the use of Likert scales include dissention regarding whether the data is interval or ordinal in nature, whether a mid-point should be used, and also whether the number of categories on a scale impacts the responses provided (Ogden & Lo, 2011). Concerns around the cross-cultural applicability of Likert scales have also been raised (Heine, Lehman, Peng & Greenholtz, 2002; Lee, Jones, Mineyama & Zhang, 2002). Furthermore, Likert scales may fail to capture "...complexity or more subtle nuances" (Marczyk et al., 2005, p. 118).

However, the use of the Relational Method is more germane to the context of this study, and is in keeping with an interpretive, hermeneutic, phenomenological approach that has to date not found a firm footing in the research on perceived organisational reputation. The ideas of lived experience, historical consciousness, the linguisticity of experience, the highly situational meaning systems that are created, and the notion of dialogical selves in narrative and organisational sensemaking provide a rich and complex tapestry that lends itself seamlessly to the use of the Relational Method in this study. Furthermore, the reciprocity of reputation and the consequent dynamic interrelatedness between the 'inside and outside' makes the method even more significant in this study, this will be further illuminated below.

## 5.4 The Relational Method: An Overview

The decision to use the Relational Method was based on the desire to tap into the various layers of meaning in the narratives that public servants shared about their perceived organisational reputation, and their sense of organisational identification. The method was originally developed by Brown, Gilligan and their colleagues (Brown et al., 1991; Brown & Gilligan, 1991) to study women's narratives of moral conflict. It therefore originated within a feminist paradigm that sought to pursue work on questions of social justice, and to uncover power dynamics and relationships by attending to the voices of women from a number of perspectives (Hopkins, 2011; Paliadelis & Cruickshank, 2008). It had the specific aim of listening to women "...in and on their own terms" (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998, p. 3).

The researcher therefore listens for those relationship and societal forces that appear to either enable, constrain, or silence a full expression of the participants' 'selves' (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Hopkins, 2011). An overt and self-conscious reflexivity is pertinent in this method and is also underpinned by a deep awareness that the researcher, method, and data are "reflexively interconnected and interdependent" and are not separate entities (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998, p. 414). This method therefore strongly advocates the 'criticality' and 'integrity' discussed in Section 5.7.2.1.

Given the highly complex public sector context in South Africa that was presented in Section 3.5, it is evident that questions of social reform, democracy, justice, and the quest for a 'voice' and equality in South Africa creates the type of flavor in this research that remains true to its roots. Furthermore, the Relational Method forces the researcher to become overtly self-reflective with regard to their own role in the research process and whether it is in fact

contributing to destructive, hegemonic social practices. It therefore poses the following questions for the researcher:

Who is my research for? What right have I to undertake this research? What responsibilities arise from the privileges I have as a result of my social position? Does my writing and speaking reproduce a system of domination, oppression or challenge it? (Barton, 2004, p. 325)

As such, “The method aims at ensuring that the voices’ of the narrators, those of the research participants, are not overridden by the researcher” (Finch, 2010, p. 73). As stated by Mauthner and Doucet (1998), researchers need to incorporate a strong reflexivity that probes whether “...we are in fact appropriating their voices and experiences, and further disempowering them by taking away their voice, agency and ownership” (p. 24). The method is also fitting in the context of this study where the centrality of relationships and listening is emphasised. However, even more pronounced is the idea that the stories of participants in the public sector are so richly textured by, and interwoven with larger legacy and current social dynamics and contexts in South Africa’s tumultuous political history.

Research using the Relational Method is conducted as follows: participants are invited to tell a story about a conflict or uncertainty that they have experienced – the method then involves three to four sequential readings or *listenings* of the text (Brown et al., 1991; Brown & Gilligan, 1991; Hopkins, 2011).

The first listening involves focusing on the plot of the narrative and the researcher’s responses to the story that unfolds. The second listening involves focusing on the voice of the ‘I’ – the narrator’s first-person account. The third listening centres on the narrator’s interpersonal relationships, while the fourth reading generally locates the narrator within her socio-cultural

context (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Hopkins, 2011; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Mauthner & Doucet, 2003; Paliadelis & Cruickshank, 2008). These steps are referred to as ‘listenings’ rather than readings as the dialogical nature of the process requires that both the researcher and participants actively engage in the process. Furthermore, the multi-layered and unique narrative voices and their relationships serve as windows into the participant’s experiences – but also into societal influences and the human condition.

Each listening is intended to “...bring the researcher into relationship with a person’s distinct and multi-layered voice by tuning in or listening to distinct aspects of a person’s expression of her or his experience within a particular relational context” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 4). In keeping with the notion of dialogical selves, voice is contrapuntal, hence, simultaneous voices can occur with the self, with the voices of others who the narrator is in a relationship with, and in some instances, with the broader socio-cultural context within which the narrator is embedded. Furthermore, these voices can be in harmony or discord with each other (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Hopkins, 2011; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). The fluidity of voices embedded in a narrative is thus strongly emphasised. As stated by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006), this method “...offers a way of illuminating the complex and multilayered nature of the expression of human experience and the interplay between self and relationship, psyche and culture” (p. 19).

The different vantage points that are taken in the study of the text allow the researcher to listen for different ‘voices’ within the same person. They further enable the researcher to truly exercise both reflexivity and responsiveness to the narratives that are shared. The robustness of the narrative frame that was outlined in Section 5.2 finds a pertinent place in the Relational Method where the researcher traverses both the personal and the political *with* the narrator in the

stories that are shared, thereby creating a truly ‘relational’ experience. As stated by Giwa, James, Anucha and Schwartz (2014), this method “...holds that individuals are interrelated and embedded in complex social relations in which they transform and are transformed by others” (p. 225).

## **5.5 Testing the Feasibility of the Relational Method**

Having discussed the Relational Method and its relevance to the research questions posed in this study, its application will now be addressed. The pilot study will be addressed, followed by the main study.

### **5.5.1 Pilot study**

Pilot interviews were conducted using an open-ended, semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix 1). It listed key questions that were approached intuitively and in a well-timed manner to maintain the rhythm and flow of the stories that were related. These questions served as a broad prompt and guideline, and were derived from insights into the literature on corporate reputation, my personal experiences during my work projects in local government, as well as my ‘hunches’ about what was appropriate to broach with the interviewees.

The semi-structured interview format is advantageous as it allows participants to provide detailed and free-flowing narratives, yet maintains a degree of direction, control and focus in the process, thereby enabling the researcher to probe into areas requiring further clarity (Arthur & Nazroo, 2003; Fossey et al., 2002; Kelly, 2006a). In so doing, and in keeping with the Relational Method’s appreciation of the active role of the researcher and the uniqueness of each participant, meaning-making can truly be pursued.

One of the major concerns at this stage was whether the participants would be able to engage with the construct of perceived organisational reputation and whether the construct could be positioned simply and clearly enough to evoke meaningful conversation. Four participants took part in the pilot study, one White female and three African males. Three of the participants were deputy directors, and one was a senior specialist. All of them worked within the support services functions in the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality. They ranged in age from 39 to 52. All had received a tertiary education as one had an undergraduate degree and the remaining three had post-graduate degrees. Their years of service ranged from 10 years to 25 years in local government jobs.

Guided by the semi-structured interview protocol, the participants were invited to tell a story involving a time when they felt that the reputation of their organisation was at stake or under threat. I followed up with questions where further clarity was needed. Contrary to my concerns, the participants in the pilot interviews latched onto the idea of perceived organisational reputation instantly, perhaps providing evidence of the current zeitgeist where outsider perceptions and the intense public scrutiny of what local government can deliver is ‘top of mind’. Hence, the narratives unfolded without much difficulty. The conversations proceeded so well that, surprisingly, no amendments to the interview schedule were necessary.

What was immediately noticeable was the ‘emotional baggage’ that seemed to characterise all four pilot interviews. The participants used the following types of words to express their feelings – “defeated”, “fatigued”, “guilty”, “hijacked” and “eats away at self-worth”. It was quite a jarring observation and it was clear that sensitivity and empathy would need to be exercised in dealing with participants, given the emotionally laden context and questions that were being dealt with. The great value yielded from the pilot process was the

rhythm that was established in the use of the interview schedule. The process also confirmed that the schedule was tapping into the type of rich and complex narratives required for this study to be successful.

## **5.6 The Main Study**

### **5.6.1 The participants**

The participants for this study were drawn from the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality (hereafter referred to as ‘the City’), in the province of Gauteng. The municipality is a most appropriate context for this study as Johannesburg is both the financial and commercial heartbeat of South Africa. The municipality provides widespread public services across approximately 1664 square kilometers, and is also the most urbanised and densely populated municipality, home to approximately 4.4 million people (Statistics South Africa, 2016).

The participants were sourced from a range of departments at the City, and for the purpose of maintaining confidentiality, they were grouped into ‘support services’ (e.g. participants servicing internal clients within the City, enabling them to deliver to citizens) and ‘citizen-facing’ functions (participants servicing citizens of the City directly).

Nonprobability, purposive sampling was employed in this study (Patton, 1990; van der Riet & Durrheim, 2006). The sampling strategy employed in this study aimed to develop a detailed and in-depth analysis of public sector employees’ accounts of perceived organisational reputation. Given the exploratory nature of this work, defining exactly how many employees to interview at the outset was not the ideal. As in most qualitative research endeavours, ideas about the sample were initially somewhat vague at the beginning of the study and crystallised during the course of the investigation (Flick et al., 2004). In purposive sampling, the researcher seeks



information-rich cases, which are then studied in-depth. Hence, the researcher does not pursue the discovery of common categories of human experience, but rather seeks an understanding of meaning in context (Fossey et al., 2002; Kelly, 2006b).

For the purposes of this study, the participants at executive/senior levels in the organisation, and also at middle management levels were identified in order to determine whether 'rank' in the organisation had any bearing on the findings of the study. Furthermore, participants with varied tenure in the organisation were identified – specifically, a tenure of five to ten years, ten to 20 years, and a tenure of greater than 20 years. On the one hand, the experiences of people with longer tenure in the organisation were believed to be likely to elicit historical nuances in the environment and ensure the 'lived experience' sought within this context. On the other hand, people with shorter tenure could possibly have a 'fresh take' on matters in local government post-transformation, and could therefore possibly provide different views on the political dispensation as its consequent government and administrative changes have radically evolved. Maximum variation sampling considerations therefore came into play (Fossey et al., 2002).

The participants were identified through my existing networks at the City, as I was previously employed in local government and was able to draw on key and trusted relationships that were cultivated there. Even at this stage of the research, I endeavoured to draw upon the researcher reflexivity that would allow me to become fully immersed in the research context. This therefore enabled me to be simultaneously positioned 'in' the research and 'on' the research. Once interviewed, the participants were asked to identify others who could also share their valuable experiences. This procedure is known as 'snowball sampling' (Durrheim & Painter, 2006); sampling then proceeded to redundancy until theoretical saturation was achieved.

The demographics of the sample are illustrated in Figure 1 below. The sample comprised 15 participants. Of these, ten (66.7%) were females and the remaining five (33.3%) were males. The sample comprised three African males, three African females, one White male, five White females, one Indian male, and two Indian females. Their ages ranged from 38 to 59 and their tenure ranged from eight years to 39 years – three participants had five to ten year's tenure, three participants had ten to 20 years' tenure and the remaining nine had more than 20 years' tenure in the organisation. With regard to their roles within the organisation, three employees were junior managers within support functions in the organisation; four were middle managers, three were in support functions, and one in a citizen-facing function. Finally, eight of the participants were executive/senior managers, four worked within support functions, and four were in citizen-facing functions. In terms of their educational qualifications, most of the participants (ten) had post-matric diplomas, while three had undergraduate degrees, and two had post-graduate degrees.

It is important to note that qualitative researchers do not create rigid boundaries between the different phases of research, and avoid the artificial division between the iterative process of data collection and data analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The research questions and sampling strategies may therefore be amended as new insights emerge in the research process. Based on this dynamism in the process, the sampling mechanisms employed can be streamlined to investigate, for example, 'critical case sampling', or 'confirming and disconfirming cases' (Fossey et al., 2006; Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The researcher gave due attention to these aspects throughout the research process.

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Tenure</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Qualification</b>
<b>Shanti</b>	Indian	Female	38	5-10 years	Junior Mgt - Support Services	Post-matric diploma
<b>Bheki</b>	African	Male	40	5-10 years	Junior Mgt - Support Services	Post-matric diploma
<b>John</b>	White	Male	52	20+ years	Senior Mgt - Support Services	Post-matric diploma
<b>Mila</b>	White	Female	46	20+ years	Senior Mgt - Citizen-Facing	Undergrad degree
<b>Hoosen</b>	Indian	Male	45	20+ years	Senior Mgt - Support Services	Undergrad degree
<b>Peter</b>	African	Male	59	20+ years	Middle Mgt - Support Services	Post-matric diploma
<b>Ronelle</b>	White	Female	45	10-20 years	Senior Mgt - Citizen-Facing	Post-matric diploma
<b>Irene</b>	White	Female	49	20+ years	Junior Mgt - Support Services	Post-matric diploma
<b>Emma</b>	White	Female	57	20+ years	Middle Mgt - Citizen-Facing	Post-matric diploma
<b>Grace</b>	African	Female	54	20+ years	Senior Mgt - Citizen-Facing	Post-matric diploma
<b>Busi</b>	African	Female	56	10-20 years	Senior Mgt - Citizen-Facing	Post-matric diploma
<b>Zarina</b>	Indian	Female	57	20+ years	Middle Mgt - Support Services	Post-matric diploma
<b>Tessa</b>	White	Female	48	20+ years	Senior Mgt - Support Services	Postgrad degree
<b>Vuyo</b>	African	Male	48	10-20 years	Senior Mgt - Citizen-Facing	Postgrad degree
<b>Zuko</b>	African	Female	45	5-10 years	Middle Mgt - Support Services	Undergrad degree

Figure 1: Participant demographics

### 5.6.2 Procedure

In-depth and open-ended narrative interviews were conducted with the identified employees. This enabled them to share their stories about their perceived organisational

reputation in the public sector within the context of their career histories and experiences. A narrative can be oral or written, and can be derived during interviews, fieldwork, or conversation (Chase, 2005). Narrative interviews were selected for this study because it is a more egalitarian methodology in that it respects and reflects participants' sensemaking processes, and endorses a power-sharing stance while elevating positionality and subjectivity in the work (Riessman, 2000; Riessman, 2005). According to Riessman (2005), it offers an avenue to "forge dialogic relationships and greater communicative equality in social research" (p. 5). However, the most compelling argument for the use of narrative interviews in the context of this research is that they can reflect personal, organisational and societal content (Hawkins & Saleem, 2012). This is vital with regard to the milieu being studied, and the research questions that were deemed pertinent. In this study, narrative is foregrounded, and as stated in Section 5.2, is both apt and powerful to contextualise research on perceived organisational reputation. As such, the narrative interviewing methodology fits seamlessly into this study.

The research relationship can be described as being one of 'narrator' and 'listener' (Chase, 2005). It involves a fundamental shift from the traditional interviewer-interviewee dynamic, as the interviewees are narrators with stories to tell who have a voice of their own and are not merely passive subjects responding to abstract research questions. Although there are various social situations that impact, enable or inhibit the narrator, the narrative researcher is deeply attuned to the uniqueness of the narrator's voice and story (Chase, 2005). The researcher therefore seeks the richness, authenticity and depth of a discursive account, and follows the narrator on a narrative trail (Riessman, 2000). The manner in which the researcher therefore 'invites' stories is critical – popular culture has widely socialised the staid 'question-and-answer'

interview format, therefore without an overt invitation to relate their story, narrators may not assume this role (Chase, 2005).

Appointments were scheduled telephonically with the participants, all of whom were interviewed in their offices in an effort to make the process as convenient as possible for them, but also to minimise any potential power differentials between the participants and the researcher. The study was introduced as an attempt to understand public sector employees' understanding and experiences of reputation in local government, particularly with regard to a time when the participants felt that the reputation of the City was at stake, or under threat. The participants' concerns and questions about the study were discussed upfront. I conducted all of the interviews myself, and these were audio-recorded with the participants' permission – all but three of the participants declined the offer to be audio-recorded. I also probed for further clarity as and when required, especially with regard to the personal feelings that the narrators' experiences conjured up for them, which was an area that required gentle, yet persistent focus. I validated my understanding of the stories that were being told by checking that my interpretation of what was conveyed was correct. The timing of these 'check-backs' was important so as not to disrupt the flow of the conversation. The less structured interview format enabled me and the narrators to participate more freely, and to attend to the stories that emerged naturally in a way that was unfettered by pre-determined categories and criteria (Stevens & Doerr, 1997). An attitude of openness was imperative in this approach (Abma, 2003).

The interviews varied in duration from one to two hours. An attempt was made to transcribe the interviews within a day after they were conducted, however, due to time constraints, this was not always possible. Where prompt transcribing occurred, I added my personal observations about the encounter in parenthesis, while it was still vivid in my mind.

Following the transcription of each interview, summary notes were drafted that noted the key themes, ideas, hunches and issues that emerged from the interview (Appendix 2). Where further clarity was required from the participants, these were also included in the summary notes. Where it was possible and needed, brief follow-up appointments were scheduled with the participants to reach clarity on issues picked up during the transcribing process – these were not longer than 30 minutes in duration. Seven follow-up appointments were held.

### **5.6.3 Analysis**

Data analysis is not a discrete phase of the research process, and is inextricably bound with the total research process, including data collection. In the listening process, the researcher co-produces the story performance with the narrator (Boje, 1991b; Polkinghorne, 2007). The researcher therefore permeates the text through the research boundaries and disciplinary preferences that she employs, and the emerging and evolving themes (Chase, 2005). The analytic process became more explicit and pronounced during the transcription of the interviews and the researcher's immersion in the data.

As mentioned in earlier sections, the Relational Method was used to analyse the data in this study. This involves a set of three or more sequential readings of an interview text, which inform each other (Balan, 2005; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998). As noted by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006), these steps are referred to as 'listenings' rather than 'readings' due to the active participation of both the narrator and the researcher.

#### **5.6.3.1 Listening 1: The plot**

The purpose of the first listening is to attend to the 'plot' of the narrator's story – its key events, protagonists, themes, contexts, and images. The researcher begins to gain a sense of what

is happening in the story, where it is occurring, who is involved, and why events unfolded the way that they did (Balan, 2005; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Hesse-Bieber & Leavy, 2006). In engaging with the participants, I focused on recurring metaphors, contradictions and conflicts that came to the fore, as well as certain extra-linguistic cues that gave colour and feeling to the narrators' experiences (Balan, 2005; Hesse-Bieber & Leavy, 2006; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Kelly, 2006a).

Practically, the process was executed as follows. Using a coloured pen, I highlighted recurring metaphors and words, as well as idiosyncratic expressions and colloquialisms, for example, a participant used the metaphor 'burning' to denote how the City was being mismanaged by those in charge, and the intensity of her feelings about this matter. The word 'burning' was highlighted whenever it occurred in the story, and notes, observations and comments were also inserted into the transcripts.

I listened to the audio-recordings during the listenings so that I could be 'mentally transported' to the exact moment that specific sentiments were relayed. Furthermore, the extra-linguistic cues that emerged were captured to impart the emotional feeling in the story, for example, another respondent clicked her tongue repeatedly, followed by deep sighs, to communicate her sense of frustration and despair at the stressful situations she encountered at the City. A worksheet was completed after each listening, which contained information on the key events, themes, conflicts and contradictions (Appendix 3).

The listening also involved an acute orientation of my own responses to the story being relayed. In so doing, I made explicit my own thoughts, feelings, opinions and assumptions in relation to the narrator and the narrative. This is the essence of reflexivity, and in 'declaring' these assumptions, my own background and experiences came to the fore. These were therefore

accounted for in the context of the study, as ultimately, they could influence my tone and how I wrote about the person (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998). Furthermore, as stated by Mauthner and Doucet (1998), “Our intellectual and emotional reactions to other people constitute sources of knowledge; it is through these processes that we come to know other people” (p. 12).

One of my concerns was that because of a few recent personal, poor experiences with the municipality servicing my own residential area, I could have subconsciously imparted feelings of bias or judgment when the participants relayed their experiences. In order to elicit a different perspective, a colleague was enlisted to independently read through the pilot interviews. Although unfamiliar with the Relational Method, she did possess a deep interest in qualitative, and specifically narrative methodology, and was therefore well-placed to assist. An overview of the method was provided to her and once she had worked through the interviews, our notes and key themes were compared. The process that followed was in part shaped by the joint learnings gained through this collaboration. It would have been ideal to continue this partnership through the entire study for the interviews that followed, however, her time pressures and personal commitments could not accommodate this, given the time-consuming nature of the analysis.

#### **5.6.3.2 Listening 2: The voice of the speaking person**

The second listening attends to the voice of the subjects and “...how this person speaks about her/himself and the parameters of their social world” (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008, p. 405). It is focused squarely on the participant and how they speak, feel, experience and position themselves (Balan, 2005; Hesse-Bieber & Leavy, 2006; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998). Instead of imposing the researcher’s own categories on the participant, this specific reading magnifies the focus on the participant’s sense of personal agency and how they view themselves. Recognising the participant’s personal motivations and own social location is vital here as this guards against



a reductionist, qualitative orientation. Paying attention to personal pronouns like ‘I’, ‘we’ and ‘you’ became pivotal at this stage. Using a different coloured pen, I traced all of the instances when the participants used these personal pronouns. In performing this concrete step of attending to the ‘I’, the researcher exercises responsibility, respect, empathy and understanding for the voice of the narrator.

### **5.6.3.3 Listening 3: The self-in-relation**

While the first two listenings can be thought of as ‘standard’ to the method, the listenings that follow are highly attuned to the specific research context and the particularities of the relationships (Listening 3) and broader social context in which these relationships are embedded (Listening 4).

It is in these steps that the researcher works through the strands of the narrative that speak to the specific research questions. This is based on the theoretical frameworks employed by the researcher and the previous ‘listenings’ undertaken (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). How narrators employ different voices regarding their relationships with others and how they place people within social and cultural structures becomes pertinent at this point (Canavan, Byrne & Millar, 2004). Listening for the “contrapuntal voices” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006, p. 12) is an iterative process, and determining how the various voices from the initial ‘listenings’ either move in harmony or discord with the contrapuntal voices becomes an important element at this stage, yielding numerous questions that require reflection.

Listening 3, which involves the self-in-relation, is about listening to just one voice at a time in the text, and in so doing, the researcher begins to see the relationship between the narrator’s first-person voice and the additional voices. Again, using different coloured pens, I outlined these different voices or characters that came to the fore. What was clear in Listening 3

is that there are those voices that support the participant's expression of themselves, and those that seem to either constrain or inhibit this expression, for example, what was evident in a particular listening was that a participant felt inspired, motivated and loyal to the community that she helped and provided a service to. When she rendered a quality service, it made her "shine" and "feel appreciated". This enabling relationship was, however, undermined when she expressed that she felt stifled by senior leaders in the City, who she believed did not set her up to succeed in her role as they failed to provide direction and support to her. She spoke of a "rocky road" and expressed the following: "If you don't have the right people, you will never be able to achieve your goals."

The process was physically executed by drawing a circle representing the narrator in the centre of a page and then linking the other characters or voices (relationships) to the narrator via arrows. The analysis was guided by asking how the narrator actually felt about these relationships, how they either constrained or enabled them to fully express themselves or take action on the matters raised. Furthermore, the power dynamic between the participant and these relationships was further explored. An example of how this listening proceeded is illustrated in Figure 2.

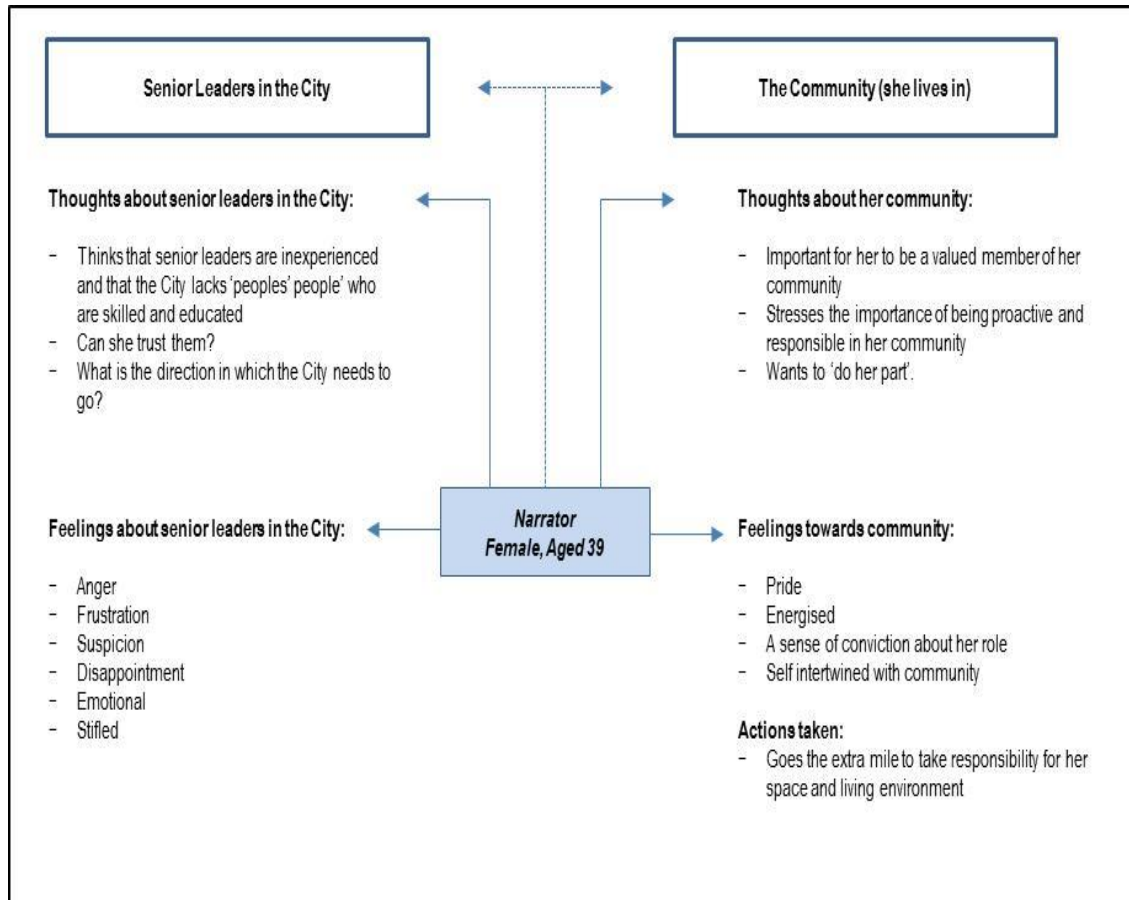


Figure 2: Listening for Self-in-Relation

**Note:** - · - · -> Dotted arrows indicate the main actors in participant's narrative.  
-> Solid arrows indicate participant's thoughts and feelings towards those involved.

#### 5.6.3.4 Listening 4: The social and cultural context

Listening 4 focuses on the dominant social ideologies, cultural paradigms and social constructs that shape, and are in turn shaped by, the participants (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008). Therefore, the participants' social and cultural contexts are taken into account (Balan, 2005; Hesse-Bieber & Leavy, 2006; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998). South Africa's complicated socio-political history and its impact on the public sector certainly has a bearing on their perceived organisational reputation. It is, in fact, virtually impossible for any public sector employee to extricate themselves from the complex and rich tapestry that is public sector life. Categories such

as ‘family’, ‘community’ and ‘South African politics’ emerged during the listening. As stated by Mauthner and Doucet (1998) in their description of their own analytic processes, “In the fourth reading, we placed our respondents’ accounts and experiences within broader social, political, cultural and structural contexts” (p. 17).

As in Listening 3, a circle representing the narrator was drawn in the centre of a page – institutions and associated beliefs were then linked to the narrator via arrows. I looked into the nature of the relationship between the narrator and these institutions, as well as what was at stake in this dynamic (e.g. power, integrity, support, courage). These points have been summarised as in the example in Figure 3.

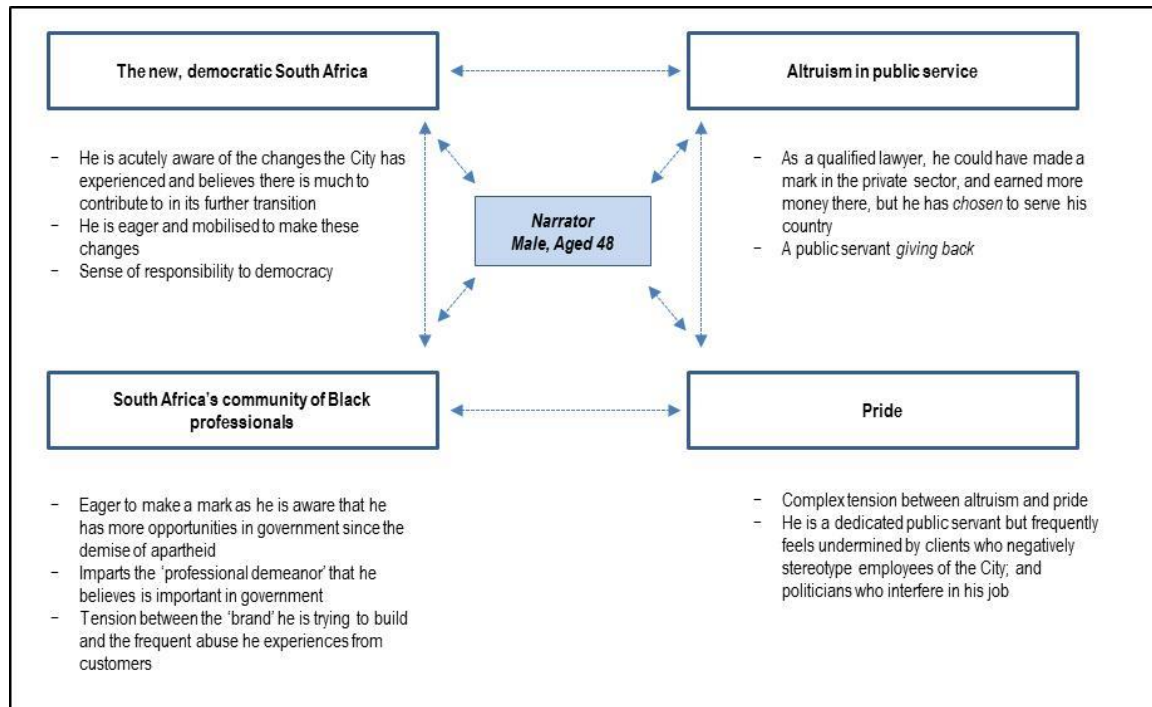



Figure 3: Listening for narrator in socio-cultural context

**Note:**  Bidirectional arrows indicate that the narrator is influenced by these systems, but also concurrently influences them. The systems are also interdependent and influence each other.

### 5.6.3.5 Summary and consolidation of readings

Upon completion of the listening process, the researcher made short narrative summaries of each transcript (an example is provided in Appendix 4). Concerns such as the tensions between internal power dynamics in the City and their impact on relationships with communities were noted. A matrix of the informants by readings was also compiled (see example of a 'Listening Matrix' for a participant in Appendix 5). The rows captured issues from one participant, while the columns compared all of the participants on one reading. A count was also taken of the participants' concerns – these were 'simple' counts as the fact that an issue was raised does not reveal its underlying dynamics or nuances.

Next, I drew relationships between emerging concepts. The colleague who had assisted in the initial analysis of the data was again called upon to assist. The products of Listeners 1-4, the memos, worksheets and narrative summaries compiled were laid out on a table. Over approximately three days, we collaboratively theorised about and deliberated possible relationships between emerging concepts, and discussed and debated these at length. In order to stay connected to the original ‘thick’ data, I often reverted to the original transcripts. The texts illustrating similar ideas were then cut and pasted together.

A large, visual diagram was steadily and incrementally built up to depict the emerging concepts using the themes from the transcripts. ‘Post-its’ and stickers of various colours further illustrated the ‘visual’. I continued to consult the original transcripts throughout the process as they anchored the summary and consolidated the vast amounts of information that were yielded in the analytical process.

## **5.7 Issues of Reliability and Validity**

Traditional positivistic notions of reliability and validity are irrelevant for interpretive research approaches, precisely due to the ontological, epistemological and methodological reasons explicated in Section 5.1.1. Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Mishler (1990), amongst various other authors, have attempted to clarify issues of reliability and validity as they pertain to qualitative research. The authors concur that the Correspondence Theory of Truth is inappropriate to assess validity claims in qualitative research. Furthermore, the idea that there are various audiences, in which the researcher is also immersed, is important. This is captured in the following quote:

If we are no longer able to rely upon correspondence with the empirical world as the ultimate arbiter of truth, a more pragmatic argument can be made that the outcome of research will tend to be evaluated in terms of [its] persuasiveness and ability to inspire an audience. (Pigeon & Henwood, 1997, as cited in Kelly, 2006c, p. 281)

As such, the trustworthiness of procedures is vital for validity claims to be made (Kelly, 2006c; Mishler, 1990; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers, 2002), and an account of how the data and findings were yielded is critical. Kvale (1995) has also highlighted the quality of the “...craftsmanship, with an emphasis on quality of research by checking, questioning, and theorizing on the nature of the phenomena investigated” (p. 19). While qualitative research demands rigour in the form of reliability, consistency and its truth value, “Methods are tools and instruments the effectiveness of which will only be maximized in the hands of a skilled, dexterous and creative user” (Watts, 2014, p. 1).

Although there is no consensus on a universal set of criteria used to assess qualitative research, there are certainly strategies that lend to its rigour while still creating space for the creativity that should give every piece of qualitative research produced its own flavour and uniqueness (Noble & Smith, 2015; Watts, 2014; Whittemore, Chase and Mandle, 2001). The reliability and validity considerations below draw upon these insights. As stated by Watts (2014), sound qualitative research:

...requires a subtle combination of science and art, rigor and creativity. The qualitative researcher should care about the viewpoints of their participants, demonstrate an empathetic ability to understand, possess the mental dexterity to appreciate their data from both first- and third-person perspectives, be able to select extracts with purpose on

the basis of their quality and potential impact and have the patience and tenacity to subject each chosen extract to considerable interpretative scrutiny. (Watts, 2014, p. 11)

### **5.7.1 Reliability**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), reliability (referred to as ‘dependability’) refers to the extent to which the research process is both consistent and stable across time, researchers and method. Noble and Smith (2015) speak of the importance of the transparent and clear description of the research process from the outset, through to the development of the content and methodology, and the presentation of the findings. To this end, the data were collected from a variety of participants (e.g. participants with different tenures within different roles in the City). Wherever possible, interviews were transcribed within two days of being completed, hence the field observations were added quite easily.

The strength of the Relational Method lies in the fact that it necessitates focused attention on the ‘auditability’ of the process through the various, meticulous ‘listenings’ conducted and the stipulated transcription methods that support this process. This bolsters the “decision trail” that is so vital for qualitative studies (Noble & Smith, 2015, p. 35). Contact summary sheets were compiled, and follow-up interviews were further conducted where required. Finally, a colleague was involved in both the initial and concluding stages of the analysis of data, and I constantly sought to check her perspectives against mine in order to bring a richer understanding to the interpretation.

### **5.7.2 Validity**

As stated above, the purpose of qualitative research is not to expound a Correspondence Theory of Truth. Rather, it is more concerned with positioning “defensible knowledge claims”



(Kelly, 2006c, p. 378). As such, Kvale (1995) introduces ‘argumentation’ in establishing validity and indicates that it should be established communicatively. This communicative validity is central to the veracity of knowledge claims, and occurs in a dialogue with an interpretive community, as put forward by Kelly (2006c).

There is, however, a balance required. Creativity within the narrative interviewing methodology endorses thick and vivid descriptions of experiences, innovative accounts and the use of evocative language, however, this should not be perpetuated at the expense of quality and analytical rigour. As indicated by Whittemore et al. (2001), “Elegant and innovative thinking can be balanced with reasonable claims, presentation of evidence, and the critical application of methods” (p. 527). I was attentive to this element throughout the research process. Further validity considerations are outlined below.

#### **5.7.2.1 Coherence**

Coherence refers to the credibility of the study, namely, in terms of the inherent logic of the paradigm, purpose of the research, context in which the research takes place, and the methodological considerations. Verification is an important aspect of qualitative research, and the iterative, non-linear character of qualitative research ensures that constant checking builds quality output. Hence, the process of “...analysis is self-correcting [and] a good qualitative researcher moves back and forth between design and implementation to ensure congruence among question formulation, literature, recruitment, data collection strategies, and analysis” (Morse et al., 2002, p. 17).

As indicated in earlier sections of this chapter, the interpretive, hermeneutic, phenomenological approach is highly appropriate for this type of narrative research. Furthermore, the Relational Method lends itself extremely well to the notion of dialogical selves

in narrative and organisational sensemaking. Hence, paradigm, purpose, context, and method join seamlessly for a fresh take on public sector employees' perceived organisational reputation. Two further strategies were employed to improve coherence: triangulation and member validation (Kelly, 2006c; Morse et al; 2002).

Triangulation refers to the multiple perspectives that the researcher uses to check her own position, and the different methods or theories used to study the same phenomenon (Flick et al., 2004; Fossey et al., 2004; Kelly, 2006c). Therefore, the results were interpreted from a few different perspectives, namely, hermeneutics, dialogism, and a narrative approach, thereby attending to theoretical triangulation.

The findings were also referred to a few participants for their feedback, a procedure known as member validation (Cho & Trent, 2006; Kelly, 2006c; Flick et al., 2004). This is important in checking how accurately the participants' responses have been represented in the study. Member validation embraces *criticality* and *integrity*, both of which speak to the pressing need for researcher reflexivity and the spirit of openness that incorporates critical appraisal. Interpretive enquiry is a joint production between the narrator and the researcher, thus guarding against researcher bias and 'flights of fantasy' is imperative. Polkinghorne (2007) cautions the researcher in this regard, "Because interview texts are co-created, interviewers need to guard against simply producing the texts they had expected" (p. 482). Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe member checks as "...the most crucial technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314) in a study. Five participants made themselves available for follow-up interviews and were asked to comment on the emerging themes. While it would have been ideal for all to have participated in the follow-up interviews, this was not practical due to logistical and time factors.

Establishing *credibility* and *authenticity* was important to ensure that the meanings in the data were correctly and accurately interpreted in terms of their ‘truth value’, and that they remained legitimate with regard to the lived experiences of the narrators. Fairness, in this context, was derived from ensuring that there were deliberate attempts, effectively facilitated by the Relational Method, to prevent the marginalisation of voices and perspectives, and to ensure their representation in the text (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It was also imperative that I provided the time and ‘space’ for the narrators to reflect on the meanings and ideas that they wished to relate. Attending to the non-verbal aspects of the narration, including gestures and body language, was also crucial (Kelly, 2006a).

Triangulation and member validation are two validity criteria in qualitative research that contribute to the quality of the final study. With qualitative research of this nature, yet again, a balance is required. As stated by Whittemore et al. (2001), “Past experience demonstrates the incompleteness of an overemphasis on process [science without art] as well as the potential for pseudoscience by an emphasis on the research product [art without science] (p. 534).

#### **5.7.2.2 Balancing vividness with thoroughness and sensitivity**

While the need for vivid and thick descriptions (Cho & Trent, 2006) within the narrative tradition may compel researchers to embark on interpretive whims, it is this very *vividness* that can ensure that salient themes and descriptions come to the fore. I attempted to maintain a balance and self-awareness in this regard to contribute to the quality of the research. Furthermore, I aimed to ensure a level of *explicitness* through the positioning and articulation of a robust audit trail, which the Relational Method enables. I also aimed for *thoroughness* in terms of the saturation of new ideas, and links between themes and the creation of full ideas. *Sensitivity* is also a key validity consideration and highlights the need for the ‘moral fibre’ underpinning this

study and the attention that needs to be given to ‘ethics’. This notion is reiterated by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) when they state that “...the way in which we know is most assuredly tied up with both what we know and our relationships with our research participants” (p. 209).

## **5.8 Ethical Considerations**

Qualitative research in all its forms has served “as a metaphor for colonial knowledge” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1995, p. 1) and for “representation of the ‘Other’” (p. 1). As stated by Ndimande (2012), qualitative research, especially in the ethnographic tradition, has a history that is fraught with “colonizing tendencies” (p. 222). This is where the interests of the researcher have frequently been elevated at the expense of the participants. Bearing this legacy in mind, qualitative research needs to be approached with sensitivity, respect, and reflexivity. However, deliberating ethics in research is not an uncomplicated affair (Appelbaum, Lidz & Klitzman, 2009; Baez, 2002; Iphofen, 2011; Wiles, Charles, Crow & Heath, 2006). Nevertheless, highlighting these complexities does not negate the importance of attending to ethical matters in an exceptionally prudent manner so as to avoid harm to participants. They do however highlight that ethical decision-making cannot be effected with a checklist in a clinical fashion. It must be managed in a reflexive and reflective manner.

### **5.8.1 Procedural ethics: the ethical approval process**

The first step of the ethics process was the submission of my application to the University of KwaZulu-Natal’s Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee for approval. Following the ethical clearance that I received from the Ethics Committee (Protocol reference number HSS/1669/014D, see Appendix 7), I conducted a presentation of my research proposal to the School’s Higher Degrees Committee, where I gained further approval to proceed with the

research. Next, the permission of a gatekeeper was sought in order to gain access to the research site – this gatekeeper was an executive at the City of Johannesburg. I reiterated to the gatekeeper, and to the key and trusted contacts in my public sector network, the extreme importance of being respectful of the confidentiality aspects of the study. I further guaranteed that the findings would therefore not be focused on individual employees. I also committed to providing an executive summary of the report to the gatekeeper.

### **5.8.2 Process ethics: decisions made during the study**

As stated by Guilleman and Gillam (2004), “It would be naïve and mistaken for ethicists to suggest that procedural ethics is the whole of ethics—that ethical issues in the practice of research can be entirely covered by the ethics committee process” (p. 269). They refer to “ethics in practice” (p. 269), where the researcher must continuously process ethical impacts and examine ethics in motion throughout the course of a research endeavour. ‘Respect for persons’ is the key principle, and a guiding beacon that underpins the researcher’s engagement with ethics in practice. Within qualitative research, reflexivity bridges the procedural and process ethics, and provides ongoing scrutiny and deep reflection on the decisions made on an ongoing basis, thus steeling the researcher for ethical tensions that may arise. It thus addresses not only what knowledge is produced, but *how* it is produced (Guilleman & Gillam, 2004).

Within narrative research, the notion of empathy is also critical. However, Watson (2009) draws our attention to empathy being something of a double-edged sword. She indicates that it is at times an “impossible vanity” (p. 105), and “...it is not that we cannot empathize, but that we do it all too easily, projecting our own understandings onto the unsuspecting other and in the process prematurely closing down research” (p. 114). This is indeed an unsettling observation, and to find absolute ‘perfection of ethics’, given the inherent complexities in any situational

encounter in research, is a lofty ideal. Yet it draws ones attention to these complexities and to the heightened sense of responsibility that must be exercised, as well as to the negotiated nature of every interaction in the research process.

As cautioned by Emanuel, Wendler and Grady (2000), ethical requirements in research do not end after the consent forms are signed, “Individuals must continue to be treated with respect from the time they are approached – even if they refuse enrollment – throughout their participation and even after their participation ends” (p. 2707). Ramcharan and Cutcliffe (2001) appeal to ethics being deliberated in this manner, as they state that “...in this view, the research process should be sustained as with any other human interaction with good intention, in such a way as to respect and not to undermine the person emotionally, socially or physically” (p. 364).

### **5.8.3 Respect for persons**

Informed consent, nonmaleficence and beneficence underpinned the respect for the persons engaged in this research.

#### **5.8.3.1 Informed consent**

Informed consent is a critical aspect in research as it respects the autonomous decision-making of the participants. It aims to ensure that they have the opportunity to choose whether they participate in research that is commensurate with their preferences, interests and values. As such, participants cannot be treated as a mere means to an end (Emanuel et al., 2000).

In this research, the objectives of the study were explained to the participants in detail in the first meeting that was convened. I answered all of their questions patiently and respectfully, and ensured that the participants were completely comfortable about participating in the research. All of the participants were asked to sign a consent form (refer to Appendix 6). I

ensured that they understood the study, methods, and the voluntary nature of participation, and that they could withdraw from the research at any point without any negative consequences (Appelbaum et al., 2009; Baez, 2002; Wassenaar, 2006). I reassured the participants that I was not aware of who their line managers were, and had absolutely no intention of discussing their specific conversations with *anyone*, except with my research supervisor. Furthermore, I guaranteed them that no personally-identifiable information would be made available to anyone, that is, names or the divisions or departments from which participants were sourced. They all expressed a sense of ease in response to this information.

#### **5.8.3.2 Nonmaleficence**

I ensured that no harm was inflicted upon the participants as they were not deceived about the purposes of the research, and all research material was handled with the utmost sensitivity to ensure confidentiality. The interviews were recorded on a password-protected device to ensure that no one besides me could gain access to them, and all hard copies of the notes were locked in a safe.

Furthermore, electronic documents and notes were password encrypted. The anonymity of all of the participants was important, therefore, as indicated above, biographical details that would lead to their identification were omitted from the research report. Pseudonyms were used to protect their identities. This attention to anonymity greatly reduced risks in this study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1995; Wassenaar, 2006). Finally, ensuring accurate results, and thoroughness and rigour in the study ensured that the data yielded was both valid and scientific (Denzin & Lincoln, 1995), preventing fraudulent claims and fabricated materials. Lastly, all of the interviews were conducted on the participants' premises to mitigate any power differences between myself and them.

I was also palpably aware of the emotional nature of a few of the conversations that were held. Some of the participants expressed sadness and wept when relaying their stories. I was attuned during these encounters to the “...ethically important moments in doing research – the difficult, often subtle, and usually unpredictable situations that arise in the practice of doing research” (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 262). I halted the conversations at these points and enquired about their welfare and whether they were able to continue. In all situations, they expressed that they were fine, and appeared to be composed and strong enough emotionally to continue with the process. I did, however, indicate at the conclusion of these particular discussions that they should let me know if they required me to refer them to a counselor if they felt they needed to talk to someone professional to process any unexpected feelings that may have surfaced. They all politely declined. Nonetheless, I checked in with them a few days after the discussion, and they all expressed that they were ‘ok’.

#### **5.8.3.3 Beneficence**

The key findings and themes in the research report were shared with five participants upon the conclusion of the study. This occurred through face-to-face dialogue and telephonic conversations between the researcher and the participants. All of the interviewees received executive summaries of the final report.

The insights yielded from this research could be potentially beneficial for policy makers and leadership in the public sector, specifically in determining how to leverage the critical role of its employees to elevate its organisational reputation. The hope is that this work can contribute to practical and sustainable solutions in the public sector in South Africa. Upon the conclusion of the study, I therefore set up meetings with leaders and key decision makers in the public sector to



share the results and stimulate further dialogue. This effort demonstrated ongoing respect and commitment to improvements in the milieu studied (Wassenaar, 2006).

#### **5.8.3.4 Ethical complexities**

Protecting the research participants and accurately reporting high quality data is frequently experienced as a delicate balance in research settings (Baez, 2002). As such, informed consent and confidentiality can circumvent research goals by creating contrived actions on the part of both researchers and participants. These concepts are said to create the condition of ‘secrecy’ in the research context, and “secrecy can debilitate judgment because it shuts out criticism and feedback; it allows people to maintain facades of honesty; and it can spread, and in doing so, further the process of social domination” (Baez, 2002, p.46).

Corrigan (2003) has challenged the “empty ethics” that underlie informed consent, which “constructs study participants as rational actors and denies the social context in which research takes place” (Wiles et al., 2006, p. 294). These social factors include “pre-existing characteristics of the individual deciding, aspects of his or her situation, and the desires and actions of third parties” (Appelbaum et al., 2009, p. 33). As indicated by Appelbaum et al. (2009), “Indeed it would be difficult to envision a decision that is completely uninfluenced by any of these factors, and in any event the law does not require this” (p. 33). It is evident that ethical decision-making is not a matter of simply ticking boxes – judgment calls need to be made throughout the course of a research endeavour (Iphofen, 2011).

## **5.9 Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter began with positioning the appropriateness of the interpretive, hermeneutic, phenomenological approach, and subsequently, the Relational Method in this study. This method

was then presented, first with an overview of the pilot study, followed by a discussion of the main study. Next, the study's reliability and validity considerations were covered, concluding with an overview of the study's ethical imperatives.

## CHAPTER 6—RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: PART 1

In exploring perceived organisational reputation through the stories that employees relate, the first research question concerned the recurring narratives that emerged in the interview process, while the second research question concerned those narratives that were unique to the participants. The following section outlines these recurring narratives, beginning with the actual views of perceived organisational reputation, and a brief examination of the potential impact of these in light of the literature presented. Next, the ‘reasons’ for these views are presented in the form of recurring narratives, followed by those that are specific and unique to the participants.

It was evident that the participants’ perceived organisational reputation was negative. The recurring reasons provided for this were the perceived leadership void in the City; the fragmentation in the City, which leads to a compromised sense of accountability; a lack of team cohesion and peer support; the perceived corruption that has taken root at the City; the issue of the ‘billing crisis’ in the City; political interference in the running of departments; and the contradiction of a World-Class African City. There were also unique narratives that provided reasons for their poor perceived organisational reputation. These related to how the ‘perpetuating cycle’ of non-delivery by the City has created apathy in citizens; and how the City’s efforts to make improvements in the City go unnoticed by citizens due to the fundamental service delivery needs that they grapple with on a daily basis. The symbols used in transcribing the interviews are presented below in Table 2 to help the reader better understand the quotes from the transcript.

Table 2: Transcription symbols

Symbol	Meaning	Example
[ ]	The words between square brackets have been added by the author, where the meaning of the words could be inferred from the context and conversation.	E.g. [People think] everyone in the City is not good.
(.)	Indicates a brief pause.	E.g. You see (.). We just don't have a very good image with customers.
( )	The author has added the words in between the round brackets to provide greater clarity on the context or emotions expressed.	E.g. Our reputation is bad (sombre, shakes his head).
CAPITAL LETTERS	Indicates changes in the tone of voice. The tone is louder and indicates a stronger point of view.	E.g. THEY DON'T SEE THE GOOD THAT THE CITY IS DOING!
<i>CAPITAL LETTERS IN ITALICS</i>	Indicates that the tone is louder and emphasised.	E.g. <i>THEY DON'T SEE THE GOOD THAT THE CITY IS DOING!</i>
<u>Underlined words</u>	Indicates author's rather than participant's emphasis.	E.g. <u>The impression of the City is bad.</u>

## 6.1 Negative Perceived Organisational Reputation and the Shameful Labels

All 15 participants in the study communicated overwhelmingly negative sentiments about how they believed others outside their organisation perceived the organisation. These sentiments related to outsiders perceiving employees as being incompetent; having a poor work ethic; engaging in corrupt practices and self-enrichment; displaying a lack of proactiveness and poor communication; having an 'easy' job; failing to resolve the billing problems in the City; and delivering poor services. Brief quotes from each participant illustrating these sentiments follow in quick succession below, as they provide a somewhat jarring sense of how unequivocal the views were on how negatively the City is perceived by those outside it. In capturing these quotes in quick succession, I hope that I can impart some of the overwhelming sense of anger, despair, sadness and weariness that accompanied these conversations.

I felt much empathy, and even sadness, as we talked. It was difficult not to be moved by what the participants expressed and the emotions that accompanied these conversations. The participants were so earnest in sharing their views, their dilemma struck a chord with me in every single conversation. I was patently aware of how deeply their emotions ran as these emotions were palpable and generally emerged fairly early in the conversations, as if it was cathartic for them to get these feelings off their chests.

It is important to mention that although the conversations were broached with an invitation to relate a particular story of when the participants felt that the reputation of their organisation was under threat, it was evident fairly early on that the emotions that this invitation evoked meant that the participants did not relay their stories in a linear or systematic manner. Often, they went straight to the heart of how they were feeling. I soon learned that it was not helpful to try and ‘reign’ their narratives in, it was important to be attuned to wherever they needed to begin in sharing their stories in relation to the questions that I posed. In fact, this ensured the richness and depth of engagement that ensued. Next, short quotes from each participant follow.

**Shanti: 38 years old; Indian female; Support Services**

People think of us badly out there, they think we are incompetent (.), you are seen as if you don’t know what to do (appears deep in thought and silent for a few seconds).

**(Quote 1)**

**Bheki: 40 years old; African male; Support Services**

People outside just think we are useless here. It’s no wonder there are all these complaints. The City of Johannesburg is viewed as not performing (emphatic).

**(Quote 2)**

**John: 52 years old; White male; Support Services**

The people out there do not see us as competent (.). Or credible (.). Or HONEST! *THE DAMAGE HAS BEEN DONE!* (Highly emotional). Forgive me for being emotional about this (.). We are always seen as trying to dig ourselves out of a hole (his eyes well up with tears and he wearily rests his forehead in his hands).

**(Quote 3)**

**Mila: 46 years old; White female; Citizen-facing Services**

You see (.). We just don't have a very good image with customers. Customers just always hold the view that the City is always incorrect.

**(Quote 4)**

**Hoosen: 45 years old; Indian male; Support Services**

Look (.), there have been many incidents where there has been a direct threat to the City's image. You find these service delivery protests that happen because there is a perception out there that the City is not delivering on its mandate. Our reputation is bad (sombre, shakes his head). We are viewed as lethargic and slow.

**(Quote 5)**

**Peter: 59 years old; African male; Support Services**

It's a bad reflection. [People think] everyone in the City is not good (appears downcast and serious). Out there they think you are just here for public consumption. That we are dishonest.

**(Quote 6)**

**Ronelle: 45 years old; White female; Citizen-facing Services**

There has been bad publicity around the Billing Crisis. And so it definitely makes the City look bad (.). If people hear you work for the municipality, they think you are working at a USELESS INSTITUTION. You don't even want to tell people where you work because of the negative view out there (she blushes and she casts her eyes away).

**(Quote 7)**

**Irene: 49 years old; White female; Support Services**

The reputation here is bad (matter-of-fact tone). It's negative. People outside don't think much of us (shrugs her shoulders; appears detached).

**(Quote 8)**

**Emma: 57 years old; White female; Citizen-facing Services**

Everyone thinks people in the City work for Billing. If they hear I work for the Council, they IMMEDIATELY ask me to sort their account out (frustrated). We have SUCH a bad name! (Angry).

**(Quote 9)**

**Grace: 54 years old; African female; Citizen-facing Services**

It's the Billing crisis (.). Yes, yes, yes! (Frustrated). It's coming out from that. It has impacted the reputation of the City very badly. Everybody asks if you can help with this, or resolve that! (Angry). That's all they see! THEY JUST SEE CHAOS, NOTHING POSITIVE AT ALL!

**(Quote 10)**

**Busi: 56 years old; African female; Citizen-facing Services**

What do we do to communicate what we are doing for citizens? ZILCH! The impression of the City is bad. That's why the City is BURNING!

**(Quote 11)**

**Zarina: 57 years old; Indian female; Support Services**

And the City's REPUTATION! (Aghast, appears to be at her wit's end) I mean, it's bad out there. A lot of people think that people who work for the City of Johannesburg are lazy (.). And it creates a VERY bad impression out there. Some people actually say 'Oh, I want a job like yours at the Council, because they don't work there' (smirks and rolls her eyes).

**(Quote 12)**

**Tessa: 48 years old; White female; Support Services**

I think the perception out there is that employees in the public sector are incompetent and lazy (.). And that they don't have a work ethic so they don't deliver to the communities.

**(Quote 13)**

**Vuyo: 48 years old; African male; Citizen-facing Services**

The perception is that people who work in public sector don't know what they are doing. It's still rife out there.

**(Quote 14)**

**Zuko: 45 years old; African female; Support Services**

People outside don't respect the City. People here DON'T KNOW the damage they have caused! (Irritated)

**(Quote 15)**

These quotes reveal that all of the participants were highly sensitive to the negative sentiments that outsiders have of the City, mainly due to opinions of their incompetence, poor work ethic, and lack of credibility and honesty. The types of words used to describe these opinions that people outside have of them included "incompetent", "useless", "dishonest", "lazy", "lethargic" and "slow". These are all quite scathing descriptions, and as these were expressed to me, I was struck by the sense of despair and shame that these 'labels' caused them



as it would be extremely difficult to extricate oneself from these types of labels once you have become entangled in them. They are of a truly ‘personal’ nature, and have certainly fed into the psyche of this organisation. The participants talking to me about these labels seemed to instill a sombre and depressed mood in the conversations, accompanied by a range of varying, negative emotions.

As indicated in Section 2.5.2 on perceived organisational reputation, employees’ self-worth, personal identities and level of identification with their organisations are moulded by outsiders’ perceptions of them (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Helm, 2011; Helm, 2013; Riordan et al., 1997). It stands to reason then that these incredibly derogatory labels that are used in the discourse at the City must certainly manifest negative feelings in the employees, and the type of dissatisfaction and dissociation that is detrimental to organisational performance (Dutton et al., 1994; Helm, 2013; Mishra, 2013; Pruzan, 2001).

When the participants expressed their emotions, it was clear that this was not just about ‘work’; it seemed to concern their very being. A great deal of resentment, frustration and anger was expressed. Emotions ranged from expressions of weariness and fatigue (e.g. John in Quote 3) to frustration and anger (e.g. Emma in Quote 9), embarrassment (e.g. Ronelle in Quote 7), and cynicism and detachment (e.g. Irene in Quote 8). The most visceral expression of emotional and psychological pain came from John (Quote 3) who declared that the public views the City as incompetent, and lacking in credibility and honesty. His statement, “*We are always seen as trying to dig ourselves out of a hole*” is telling, as it speaks to the constant disillusionment and sense of futility that he experiences at work. He was surprised by his own tears as he spoke, it appeared that he had been bottling up these troubles for some time, and the opportunity to talk about them once again concurrently yielded some pain and relief.

Busi's (Quote 11) comment "*The impression of the City is bad. That's why the City is BURNING!*" is also incredibly evocative as it speaks to a sense of feeling threatened and to the devastation that negative perceptions have created at the City. When she said this, I was immediately mentally transported to an image of a rampant *veld* fire ploughing through the City, annihilating everything in its path.

These are indeed unsettling observations and experiences on the part of the participants because it reveals that if the premise is that employees are the bedrock of organisational reputations, and indeed the reputation of the public sector, as has been suggested, then there is a pervasive problem at play in this context. As employees' sense of self, their personal identities and attachment and identification with the organisation hinges powerfully on their perceived organisational reputation (Dutton & Dukerich, 2013; Helm, 2011; Helm, 2013), then it implies that these elements must certainly be affected. However, more on how these employees' perceived organisational reputation has shaped their organisational identification will be covered in Chapter 7.

As explained in Section 2.5.2, being part of a high functioning, well-regarded organisation cultivates strong feelings of pride, self-esteem and organisational identification amongst its members, but the opposite also holds true (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Dutton et al., 1994; Helm, 2011; Helm, 2013). Negative external perceptions can result in employees experiencing depression, stress, embarrassment, lowered morale, unhealthy competition amongst employees, a reduced focus on tasks, and disengagement from the organisation (Dutton et al., 1994; Helm, 2013; Mishra, 2013; Pruzan, 2001).

The reciprocity of reputation surfaces too. The dynamic interplay between the inside and outside, where employees shape outside perceptions, but are also shaped by them, reveals that an

insidious co-creation of negative perceptions and experiences is then underway (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Dutton et al., 1994). Almost like a self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts, the participants' negative labels feed into each other, perpetuating a cycle of destructive misalignment between employees and stakeholders outside, which contributes to an already 'loaded' public sector legacy in South Africa. This serves as a bold reminder that "...reputation is a socially shared impression – a collective construct – because it relies on an individual's perception of how other people view the firm" (Helm, 2011, p. 657-658).

## **6.2 Recurring Narratives on the Reasons for Negative Perceived Organisational Reputation**

### **6.2.1 A complex skein of shortcomings**

Every single participant referenced serious shortcomings in the City, and in almost all instances, no prompting regarding their views on this was necessary. It was, in fact, the common thread weaving its way through all of the narratives. Underpinning this, *all* of the participants (100%) shared their views and experiences of the City's lack of leadership presence; low competence and skills; the fragmentation characterising the inner workings of the City; the lack of team cohesion and peer support emanating from a lack of leadership direction; the corruption, entitlement and self-interest that has taken hold at the City; and finally, the 'billing crisis,' which permeated every conversation with these participants, and which after many years is still casting a long shadow over the City.

Eight participants (53%) expressed strong views about the untoward political interference that permeates the functioning of their departments and the City as a whole; while seven participants (47%) spoke of the inherent contradiction of the City's branding of a 'World-Class

African City’. Given that these themes featured most often, hence in a recurring fashion, they will be addressed in greater detail next, drawing upon the most pertinent extracts that afford the most ‘colour’ and substance to the matter being deliberated.

Being a citizen in South Africa means that one is constantly subjected to a barrage of media coverage on the leadership woes in government, service protests, and general lack of delivery and ethical governance. When I contemplated this research process at the City, I ardently hoped that the picture inside the organisation would not be as gloomy as the media portrays, however, this was not the case. Hearing the views of these participants was extremely telling and alarming as they resonated strongly with the media coverage that we often hear regarding maladministration in government.

#### **6.2.1.1 The deafening silence of absent leaders: the leadership void in the City**

This section utilises four extracts that provide a clear reflection of employees’ perceptions of the ‘leadership void’ at the City, experienced as an erosion of the ethics, values and behaviours that are needed to create a conducive environment in which employees can perform, lead and propagate effective service delivery and accountability.

Peter, a 59 year old African male in Support Services mentioned that he was unclear about the direction that the City was moving in. I probed further.

**Simi:**                    **You are worried then, about the direction of the City?**

Peter:                    In my view, things are becoming worse. We are not using positions for the correct reasons. People are enriching themselves. Leadership is not about a position, it’s about a responsibility. Lead. Know. Then make a decision. It is lacking. We need to review not the policies but the obstacles. Review root causes. Why did something not work? With the tenure of one mayor to the next mayor, there is no continuity. GRAB AS MUCH AS YOU CAN IN FIVE YEARS! This derails service delivery. It’s a short-term focus.

Problems can't always be thought of in terms of the lifespan of participants. What are the needs of the community? Look at the perspective of the communities and clients. They gave up because we have failed to walk the talk.

**Simi:** **I understand. What needs to happen then?**

**Peter:** If the head is not right, the body is not right. Check your skills, check your attitude. A bad attitude prevents your skills from being seen. Good skills will leave. Look at outcomes all the time. Some [leaders] are deliberately negative. Some [leaders] are ignorant. A pig in a clean environment is still a pig. Look at outcomes all the time. Look at rewards, appreciation, feedback on performance.

**Simi:** **What does that mean in terms of your career and journey in the City?**

**Peter:** Simi. (Lengthy silence). I have been here for 38 years. I have seen this City go through so many changes. I arrived here as a messenger and I built myself up. Not only for myself and to improve myself. But to improve the lives of my fellow South Africans. It has been a hard road. (Lengthy silence). I remember myself as a boy in Natal, eating sugarcane, barefoot, running in the fields - with nothing. But I came here to make a difference. What is happening is killing the organisation.

**(Extract 1)**

Peter's sentiments revealed his perceptions of the self-enrichment that leaders in the City focused on, rather than their responsibility to citizens of the City. Instead of employing an analytical, logical and probing frame of mind in order to find solutions to problems, he believed that leaders in the City employed a short-terms focus based on political tenure rather than the greater good. His firm statement "*GRAB AS MUCH AS YOU CAN IN FIVE YEARS!*" evokes an image of greed and looting, which is to the detriment of the communities, who consequently no longer believe in the City.

There was a certain musicality and wisdom in the way that Peter spoke, and the manner in which he narrated made it easy to develop a rich and detailed picture of the context he

described. His statement, *“If the head is not right, the body is not right”* aptly captures the leadership perils and lack of direction from the top. He also expressed disgust and disdain for these leaders – *“A pig in a clean environment is still a pig”*, when he explained that the attitudes and behaviours of leaders in the City were not commensurate with how they should be conducting themselves, or seeking outcomes for improvement. Using the derogatory metaphor of a pig is very intentional – the ideas of filth, greed, and slovenly behavior were imparted to fully express his revulsion.

Finally, a certain nostalgia came to the fore in Peter’s response to my question about his career in the City. It was almost like there was a stillness in the room as his mind wandered to his past, and to his childhood. After a 38 year tenure in the City, he clearly had much to reflect on. He was resolute about how he had toiled for many years to become who he is today, starting his career as a messenger during the height of apartheid, when life was extremely difficult – *“It has been a hard road.”*

His conversation unexpectedly segued to a childhood memory, where he ran barefoot in the fields as a child. This image seemed to remind him of a time when he did not have much, but he was free. There was certainly a sense of freedom created as one pictures him running through the fields barefoot, enjoying the simple pleasure of eating sugarcane. This image is starkly juxtaposed with where he finds himself now, feeling stifled and struggling to find the equality and justice that he so ardently hoped for in serving the community. As the conversation progressed, his body language changed, he initially sat upright and looked me directly in the eye. He gradually became more stooped and quiet as the conversation progressed, as if there was a ‘heaviness’ permeating his thoughts.

However, when he spoke of the contribution he always wished to make, I noticed that he resumed his initial, stoic presence and there was a toughness in his demeanour. It seemed as if he would not give up regardless of the challenges at the City as he drew his vigour from the contribution that he was making to the lives of his fellow South Africans. He was fiery when he said *“But I came here to make a difference. What is happening is killing the organisation.”*

The notion of an ‘extended self’ (Hermans, 2001) is evident here. It was extremely powerful to witness the dialogical self in motion in this particular engagement. For Peter, there was a fluidity expressed in his conception of himself in relation to the communities that the City serves, his embeddedness within a South African historical, ‘struggle’ context, and even his relationship with his younger self. What emerged was a dynamic interdependence of actors located in space, time and context, diametrically opposed to the Cartesian view of the self, which posits hermetic boundaries between the self and the body, and between self and other (Ahmad, 2009; Hermans, 2001; Hermans, Kempen & van Loon, 1992). A fusion of horizons (Annells, 1996; Finlay, 2014; Moran, 2000) was also evident as Peter merged his recollection of his past, where the organisation was positioned in the present time, and his resolute stance on continuing to take the organisation into the future.

John, a 52 year old White male in Support Services also focused on the disintegration of ethics, values, and behaviours in the City, and leadership’s failure to address the issues of poor productivity and accountability.

**Simi:**                   **So in light of what we have been discussing, what does this mean for the City?**

John:                   Things have fallen by the wayside. *ETHICS, VALUES, BEHAVIOURS!* There’s just no ethos in management control and accountability. It just doesn’t happen anymore. These days, more and more people are being employed to do less and less.

**Simi:**                   **Can you expand on that?**

John: Well, people are not doing their jobs, they are not being dealt with. THEY ARE NOT BEING MANAGED! Instead of dealing with non-performance, what they [leaders] do is they appoint additional people to do the work. Then you have TWO people not working. You've got someone delivering about 20 to 25% productivity in a day. It's ridiculous. IT'S RIDICULOUS!

**Simi: How does that make you feel?**

John: ANGRY! (Remains very quiet and contemplative for almost 10 seconds). But also *low* (looks extremely somber and downcast). I mean, who do you speak to about this?

**(Extract 2)**

While John's message was quite clear – "*There's just no ethos in management control and accountability,*" what was noteworthy about this extract was the intensity of John's frustration and anger. It was evident in this engagement that he seemed to be at his wits end, and that he experienced a sense of helplessness and disempowerment. He acknowledged that he felt angry, and found it difficult to contain his irritation when talking about his concerns.

John was quite animated and impassioned during the conversation, but just as suddenly became almost morose, somber and quiet, having reflected on his concerns about the lack of leadership in the City. I sensed during this time that he was constantly experiencing very negative and unhealthy emotions at the City as he bore witness to these destructive practices, but could not channel his emotions constructively as there was no one to channel them to. His statement, "*I mean, who do you speak to about this?*" filled me with compassion for his apparent despair and helplessness.

While the previous two extracts allude to the idea of 'absent' leaders, Zuko, a 45 year old African female in Support Services, was overt about this.



**Simi:**                **What do you feel leaders should be doing then?**

Zuko:                Leaders don't help us, they don't see the bigger picture. They are *absent*. The right hand does not know what the left hand is doing. We need a system that gives red flags internally instead of external stakeholders being disgruntled.

**Simi:**                **What do you mean by this?**

Zuko:                Leaders must be aware of where problems crop up internally and where they can help. They must take an interest and the environment must feel like an enabler. For me, what I expect is that senior leadership creates a culture or environment that emphasises that people must take pride in what they do, and they must make them a part of the organisation. They must understand WHY they do their jobs and where they fit in. Until this understanding is created by leaders, there will be NO pride in output. There will be the mentality that 'I am just a clerk' (.). You need to know that you are part of a bigger picture and leadership must take you there. Make sure everyone understands where they fit in. *BREAK THE SILENCE! I feel like there is a silence or lack of leadership presence here that makes us feel stuck.*

**(Extract 3)**

Zuko was emphatic about the importance of leaders creating an enabling and inclusive environment, where employees feel a sense of belonging, purpose, and pride. There was particular resonance when she said "*BREAK THE SILENCE! I feel like there is a silence or lack of leadership presence here that makes us feel stuck.*" Like Peter and John in the extracts above, it seems that there is a fundamental feeling of 'stuckness' caused by a deep sense of inertia. The resounding 'silence' she spoke of is this leadership void, which results in a lack of zest and spirit in ones work – "*I am just a clerk*" is probably the type of sentiment frequently expressed in the City.

Tessa, a 48 year old White female in Support Services, concurred with the sentiments expressed above when she described the ‘hands-off’ nature of leaders in the City, who delegated but did not get involved, and were not willing to “...roll up their sleeves.”

**Simi:**                **What do you mean that everyone is abdicating their responsibilities?**

Tessa:                Let me give you an example – a senior manager recently said to me ‘Tessa, why should I be doing this? I just need to delegate and to manage.’ So I thought ‘But you don’t understand your role, as a manager, you need to put processes in place to simplify some of your issues, NOT just delegate.’ At the end of the day we sit with a situation where many issues have been delegated right down to the interns that we have, to whom we are supposed to be providing experiential training. They end up doing all the work and how can they possibly do it to the expected standard? They are INTERNS! It’s truly difficult. Because everyone is just ‘folding arms’. People are not really ready to, you know, roll up their sleeves. I can truly say to you that this organisation has been kept in the air by a small percentage of people who are really passionate, and really committed. It’s a ‘principles’ thing. It’s really lacking. We have values, but it’s just values against the wall (.), not values where people have taken ownership. It has become part of who I am, to really serve with integrity, to be committed to the society. But I often experience emptiness here.

**Simi:**                **Emptiness?**

Tessa:                How can I explain better? It’s like (.) hollow. Like people do not feel the passion in their souls, and that starts at the top.

**(Extract 4)**

Tessa expressed how leaders even delegated tasks to interns at the City who had very little context and experience. She also raised concerns regarding the disintegration of values and principles and how a small minority in the organisation were truly committed to its wellbeing when she stated, “*I can truly say to you that this organisation has been kept in the air by a small*

*percentage of people who are really passionate, and really committed.”* It is an alarming reflection and articulates clearly the very dire challenges that the organisation faces. The ‘emptiness’ and ‘hollowness’ she described is deeply poignant for it ties in with the extracts above that talk to an all-encompassing leadership void, where “...*people do not feel the passion in their souls, and that starts at the top.*”

It is important to bear in mind that the perceived poor leadership at the City is a symptom of a much wider, and more deeply entrenched leadership quagmire facing the country. It is certainly manifested at the City, as in other government institutions and entities, but it would be naïve not to make reference to the national discourse at present, where questions of our very democracy are being called into question. As stated by Raymond Suttner:

No problem of government or social life can be put at the door of a single individual. They need to be located within the context of a range of institutional functions and relationships, including the role of opposition political parties in the political arena, to the extent to which they, too, contribute towards a democratic environment. But the question of leadership – considered as a relationship between office bearers, institutions and the public – is crucial. Where there is a breakdown in leadership or a failure of leadership to serve the interests of democracy, clean government and transformation, then a crucial element of a crisis is there. The leadership crisis lies in an erosion of integrity, insofar as there is conscious evasion of duties to advance the goals and aspirations outlined in the constitution. ([http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-11-24-south-africa-in-crisis-what-type-of-leadership-is-needed/#.V\\_JINyF95D9](http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-11-24-south-africa-in-crisis-what-type-of-leadership-is-needed/#.V_JINyF95D9))

As citizens of the country, we feel this leadership dissention intensely. William Saunderson-Meyer writes that, “Confined at the moment to internecine warfare between factions

of the ruling political alliance, it's a crisis that will infect the lives of every South African if not resolved.” (<http://thoughtleader.co.za/williamsaundersonmeyer/2016/05/21/zuma-washes-his-hands-of-a-looming-crisis/>). For employees of the City, who are both citizens *and* public servants, the complexities arising from this overlapping membership must be felt viscerally. It certainly came to the fore in the four extracts above.

Scholars have raised the importance of *Ubuntu* leadership (Gumbo, 2014; Idoniboye-Obu & Whetho, 2013; Ncube, 2010). *Ubuntu* is the translation of the Xhosa expression “*Ubuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*” meaning that the person is a person through other people (Karsten & Illa, 2005). Archbishop Desmond Tutu is revered for providing a compelling definition of *Ubuntu* – “Africans have a thing called *ubuntu*; it is about the essence of being human, it is part of the gift Africa is going to give to the world. It embraces hospitality, caring about others, being willing to go that extra mile for one another” (Tutu, 1995, as cited in Theletsane, 2012, p. 266). Nussbaum (2003) has also defined *ubuntu* as a consciousness:

*Ubuntu* is the capacity in African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony and humanity in the interests of building and maintaining community with justice and mutual caring. *Ubuntu*, an Nguni word from South Africa, speaks to our interconnectedness, our common humanity and the responsibility to each other that flows from our deeply felt connection. *Ubuntu* is consciousness of our natural desire to affirm our fellow human beings and to work and act towards each other with the communal good in the forefront of our minds. (Nussbaum, 2003, as cited in Idoniboye-Obu & Whetho, 2013, p. 233)

The concept of *ubuntu* has “...strong moral overtones” (Karsten & Illa, 2005; p. 614), and according to Theletsane (2012), upholds and respects “...codes of living and caring for one another” (p. 276). He extends this thinking further by sharing the potential benefits of *ubuntu*:

South Africa will not see corruption, maladministration and the other crime-related incidences that one sees in everyday life. People cannot afford to live private and individualistic lives focusing on their own interests, but need each other in order to survive, especially in the globally oppressive world. They are meant to live with one another; in fact this is the gift Africans have and could introduce to the Western world. (p. 276-277)

This is why the South African government “...has deliberately chosen its service delivery mantra and its public slogan as Batho Pele (people first) to animate, or perhaps pay obeisance to, *ubuntu*” (Matolino & Kwindigwi, 2013). However, as evidenced in this chapter, the erosion of leadership ethics, values and behaviours; the self-enrichment that leaders pursue at the expense of the communities they serve; the short-term focus on political tenure rather than the ‘greater good’; and the failure to address issues of poor productivity and accountability; as well as their shirking of their duties as leaders all point to the lack of moral substance and sense of duty towards others that *ubuntu* endorses. As stated by Gumbo (2014), “Currently, it would seem that self-enriching and corrupt schemes occupy the lives of government officials and all levels of government. This further undermines service delivery efforts and Batho Pele (people first) principles which are the terrain of *ubuntu*” (p. 69). Leaders, in the context of the participants’ experiences in the City, have fundamentally neglected their connectedness to other human beings – this connectedness is a hallmark of *ubuntu*. Ncube (2010) believes that most African leaders have behaved in ways contrary to the *ubuntu* worldview:

Although Ubuntu is the core of African culture, most African leaders have chosen to deny or ignore it. Notable exceptions are Nelson Mandela, the first president of independent South Africa; and Sir Seretse Khama, the first president of independent Botswana. These two statesmen are embodiments of the principle of Ubuntu, and their leadership fully demonstrated their traditional values. (p. 78)

According to Idoniboye-Obu and Whetho (2013), “This perhaps accounts for the endemic corruption and kleptomania found across the length and breadth of the continent as well as the sit-tight syndrome of many political leaders, which have contributed significantly to the underdevelopment of African states” (p. 241). *Ubuntu* is significant for the kind of transformational and ethical leadership required in South Africa, and “...it has been argued that governance that is based on Ubuntu will be characterised by accountability and transparency, equality, promotion of peace, self-reliance, and a commitment to the promotion of the public good in the disbursement of public resources” (Idoniboye-Obu & Whetho, 2013, p.242). *Ubuntu*’s dialogical connections will be further explained in Section 7.1.3.1, where the African conception of the ‘self’ will be positioned.

#### **6.2.1.2 Being sent from pillar to post: massive fragmentation in the City leads to a lack of accountability**

This section utilises two extracts that describe the perceived fragmentation and lack of alignment in the City, which seems to destroy a sense of ownership, accountability and even purpose. Mila, a 46 year old White female in a citizen-facing role expressed distress at the lack of organisation in the City.

**Simi:** **Tell me more about what you meant about the City needing to be more ‘organised’?**

**Mila:** What I mean is that people *WITHIN OUR OWN ORGANISATION* do not have the full view of where we fit in. It’s like there is no communication between departments (.). At this stage, it’s like we are on a ‘trial basis’ and we will see what happens. Is there a contract for this, isn’t there a contract? (Sarcastic, mocking tone, very fidgety). Another thing I have experienced is when I have a query to resolve, *I AM SENT FROM PILLAR TO POST!* ‘No, this one is dealing with this, another one is dealing with that’ (sarcastic, mocking tone and shakes her head incredulously). It means I can’t do my job properly.

**Simi:** **That sounds very frustrating.**

**Mila:** It is (.). So I think there must be forums or something where departments can start talking to each other, I don’t think a lot of employees know which departments are actually in the City. They don’t even know which department is doing what. They don’t. (.). And where they fit in, in making the City ‘world class’. I think the City is too big, it’s too big to manage so many departments. It’s absolutely massive. My family can’t believe how many employees we have, it’s like 30 000. IT’S BIG! Even between departments, there are a lot of fights, and we are not working together. ‘Credit Control’ blames ‘Billing’, ‘Billing blames Customer-Interface’ (.). IMAGINE THE IMPACT IT HAS! People are sent from pillar to post, if we don’t know which department is doing what, how will THEY? (Shakes her head in despair).

### **(Extract 5)**

Mila clearly felt that her own ability to perform was being compromised by a lack of coordination in the City. She attributed much of this problem, firstly, to communication where internally, departments do not know where they fit in the broader structure, and secondly, to the sheer size of the City, and the complexity resulting from this scale. This results in her being sent from “*pillar to post*” in her attempts to get her work done, which is a very unsettling and frustrating experience for her. Mila also raised the issue of the conflict and in-fighting arising

from the fragmentation – departments that should be working closely together blame each other for problems that arise. During this engagement, Mila was extremely fidgety and unsettled, and it was evident that describing these challenges in her work environment was distressing for her. She also expressed that if the City’s own employees did not know where they fit in, and how departments should operate and collaborate with each other, then it posed serious problems for the citizens of Johannesburg.

This perceived ambiguity of purpose was reinforced by Busi, a 56 year old African employee in a citizen-facing role. She felt that due to this fragmentation, there was a shirking of employees’ responsibilities in the value-chain of the City, and a lack of accountability.

**Simi:**                **So what needs to improve in the City, do you think?**

**Busi:**                We need to understand our purpose. There is TOO MUCH fragmentation in the City. Why are we in the service delivery business? There is this thing – a lack of accountability. As you go further down, people say ‘Ay, I’m not the boss’, that’s the wrong attitude. (Throws her hands up in the air). If the City must be clean, I must make sure that I do my role to maintain [it]. If I’m in HR, I must look after the cleaner. It’s a cycle, it’s a chain and it must be connected at all dots. This must not be lacking, because what I do for you influences your job. It’s a chain - that’s how I see it. We are a chain that needs to be connected and we are NOT. We are like beads that have broken off a necklace and have scattered everywhere.

**(Extract 6)**

The imagery she used, “*We are like beads that have broken off a necklace and have scattered everywhere*” is rousing as it so evocatively depicts the messiness, chaos and dissention that is felt. Busi drew attention to the connections that needed to be built and the importance of healthy interdependencies that create a positive work environment and experience, which



ultimately hinges on accountability. She stated, “...*because what I do for you influences your job. It’s a chain*” to convey the supportive linkages in the system that needed to be built.

We are a little over 20 years into democracy, and our various spheres of government still grapple with the systemic fragmentation that has characterised it for many decades prior to the advent of democracy in South Africa (Chipkin & Meny-Gibert, 2012). Transitioning through this process of alignment to create a unified public service with a developmental thrust is fraught with complexity. Furthermore, governments the world over grapple with systemic fragmentation, and, as stated by Cejudo and Michel (2015), “Solving complex social problems is a challenge faced by all governments” and the “...ability to effectively overcome fragmentation depends on its capacity to achieve policy integration, by taking strategic and administrative decisions to achieve a goal that encompasses – but exceeds – the programs’ and agencies’ individual goals” (p. 1). Fragmented government action has resulted from public sector reforms, endorsing disaggregation and specialisation (Carpenter & Krause, 2012; Cejudo & Michel, 2015), and while certain relatively simple problems can be addressed by specialised government initiatives, “When governmental action is fragmented, complex problems are only partially solved” (Cejudo & Michel, 2015, p. 3).

As indicated by the National Planning Commission, “Government is inherently complex. It is unrealistic to expect complete coherence on everything and so prioritisation is important” (p. 429). They do, however, endorse the need to improve coordination across all spheres of government without introducing untenable bureaucracy. This is especially important with regard to interdepartmental coordination as “...too often, departments pursue competing objectives, there are gaps where no department takes responsibility, or areas where departments could be more effective if they worked together and drew on each other’s strengths” (p. 429).

Hence, the disorder stemming from misalignments that seem to be experienced at the City are, to some degree, understandable. However, without the political and leadership will to systematically address fragmentation at the City, its developmental and service delivery ambitions will remain a pipe dream. Furthermore, ‘coordination’, as positioned by the National Planning Commission (2012), is a distinctly different concept from ‘coherence’ and ‘integration’ as they each have their own nuances within government planning processes, therefore attention must be paid to each of these concepts (Cejudo, 2015). Coordination refers to the information and knowledge-sharing that occurs within clearly defined roles and responsibilities so that actions can be appropriately channeled. Coherence typically refers to policy alignment where the ideas and objectives of different policies complement each other; and integration refers to the actual decision-making processes to achieve implementation goals (Cejudo & Michel, 2015). Local government, being at the forefront of service delivery, and the tier that people experience in their daily lives, must give consistent consideration to these concepts. While the experiences relayed in these two extracts speak more to the tactical alignment of work-related tasks, there is a more pressing need for better strategic coordination, coherence, and integration across and within government departments. Tactical misalignments can therefore be viewed as a result of neglecting these aspects.

#### **6.2.1.3 Pointers always blaming others: the City’s lack of team cohesion and peer support**

The following three extracts paint a picture of team dynamics bristling with tension. The participants referenced how the negative influence of leaders (as outlined in Section 6.2.1.1) flows into the organisation and sullies team cohesion. This happens through nepotistic appointments who are perceived to be unable to perform their jobs effectively; the poor attitudes

of employees; a lack of discipline and accountability; and the breeding of a culture of entitlement.

What results are feelings of negativity amongst employees having to ‘carry’ these poor contributors, and negative perceptions from customers who bear witness to, and experience unprofessional behavior from employees of the City. Peter, the 59 year old African male in Support Services, again offered his views (he previously featured in Section 6.2.1.1, ‘The deafening silence of absent leaders: the leadership void in the City), this time about his perceptions of the functioning of the various teams in the City.

**Simi:**                   **So, tell me more about this team dynamic?**

Peter:                   The culture needs to have integrity and discipline, but there is conflict amongst employees. There is a lack of discipline, a lack of accountability, a *laissez-faire* style. We have the right positions, but people are in them for the wrong reasons. The systems are fine but the people are unwilling to change. Leaders need to lead by example and show that there is buy-in for the right ways of working. I would need to be phoned just to present myself at work? NO! Productivity is not important to some. Senior leadership must develop a culture and an attitude of discipline and integrity. It must be instilled. If there is no measuring standard we don’t know if we are going backwards or forwards. There is no direction so people take their own route. There is also the issue of dependency and the culture of entitlement, ‘Pointers’ always blaming others... ‘I couldn’t do this because of x, y, z’. This produces low morale and productivity impacts. There is an ‘I don’t care’ attitude. *OUR CUSTOMERS SEE IT MAN!* (Highly irritable).

**(Extract 7)**

Peter felt that the culture at the City was being tarnished by leaders who were not really invested in providing direction or a sense of responsibility and professionalism amongst employees. Consequently, a “*laissez-faire*” management style abounded. Peter expressed

astonishment that certain employees needed to be telephoned in order to present themselves at work. It provides a sense of the lack of discipline and productivity that seemed to scupper the efforts of those like him, trying to perform optimally at the City.

Furthermore, the “*culture of entitlement*” where “*pointers are always blaming others*” further erodes the team dynamic and professionalism that is required. All these factors create a cesspool of negativity and bad attitudes, which he believed impacted customers’ experience. Peter was extremely irritated when he exclaimed “*OUR CUSTOMERS SEE IT MAN!*”

Vuyo, a 48 year old African male in a citizen-facing role, also spoke of the poor attitudes, lack of professionalism and sub-optimal customer-care that he witnessed in his division.

**Simi:**                **So what bothers you about the employees who work in this division?**

Vuyo:                There are people here who tell customers not to come in when they are waiting for a document, BECAUSE THEY ARE EATING LUNCH! They just stop everything they are doing and ‘now it’s time for lunch.’ We need to treat our clients like kings and queens. People don’t do what they are expected to here (.). Do what you are expected to do, and not the bare minimum. Do what you are paid to do. Do not turn a blind eye when things are not going right. It will turn on you and turn out to have a negative impact. Assist those who are struggling to do what they need to do. When there is a limp somewhere, HELP!

**(Extract 8)**

Vuyo was quite vociferous in his description of how customers were told that they cannot be assisted as employees are ‘on lunch’. When he made the statement, I cringed inside because it rang true. The stereotypical, derogatory jibes that are often made in my own social circles are the ones about ‘government workers always being on lunch’, or that, like clockwork, they shut down whatever activities they are busy with when it’s time for lunch, regardless of the inconvenience

to the customer. It was quite eye-opening for this to be revealed in this particular discussion, as up to this point I had always believed that the anecdotes were the ‘stuff of urban legend’.

Vuyo’s quest was to treat his customers *‘like kings and queens’*, but again, as in the case of Peter’s narrative, this particular ethos and ‘brand ambassadorship’ has not taken hold in their contexts, and employees have failed to perform their roles to a high standard and with integrity. They also do not lend support to others in an effort to join forces for the collective good – this is captured well by Vuyo’s emphatic statement, *“When there is a limp somewhere, HELP!”* For me, this statement instilled the unfortunate imagery of a weak, limping workforce, broken and tired, but hobbling through their environment.

Ronelle, a 45 year old White female in a citizen-facing role was visibly fatigued and demoralised by the lack of peer support and team cohesion that she experienced in her job.

**Simi:**                    **What do you mean that your colleagues do not want to contribute?**

Ronelle:                I think that there is (sic) too many people being appointed that cannot do the work. And for some reason it seems they are untouchable. So whether it might be through connections with whoever, one never knows, they seem to have that same attitude like top management has. You know ‘I’m just here to ...’ They don’t have the ethics to say ‘You know what, I’m here to do a job so I need to get my job done’. I just find there are people working for the City for so many years and they still don’t really know how to do their work. You’ve got to spoon-feed them ALL THE TIME. You know, if you don’t want to learn you are never going to learn. So you expect to be spoon-fed every day and that’s ok with you? You know they always tell us you need to empower others (.). How do you empower someone who’s not really willing to learn, who just wants to sit there, and if this is wrong, ‘Ag it’s ok, they’ll tell me what’s wrong’. You know, it’s just that attitude. And it gets people down. Especially the ones that have to carry them. It gets you down at the end of the day... (voice trails off, and she becomes tearful).

**Simi:**           **Are you okay?**

Ronelle:       Ag, sorry Simi, I'm ok. (Lengthy silence). It just becomes too much sometimes. To carry others WHO JUST DON'T GIVE A DAMN!

**Simi:**           **I understand.**

Ronelle:       (Lengthy pause). Now I mean, what are we actually showing the public out there? You know, that is definitely not the way to deal with customers. My colleagues are lying in their chairs while they are helping someone, it's just not acceptable. So these are things that actually frustrate me when I see it. And I have come to a point where it is very difficult for me to actually accept it any longer. So you manage to keep it together for a long time, but eventually you get to a point where you feel like you can't handle this anymore. And then you start speaking that negativity outside of this place. Because it's at a point where you can't handle it.

**(Extract 9)**

Ronelle felt that the nepotistic appointments of her colleagues had rendered them “*untouchable*” as they were protected by the powers that be. What this means is that they lacked both the skills, ethics, and desire to apply themselves to their roles in order to improve their delivery – Ronelle believed that they expected to be ‘*spoon-fed*’ and lacked the desire to upskill themselves. Instead, she was burdened by an overwhelming sense that she was ‘*carrying*’ them in the name of ‘*empowering others*’, which filled her with angst. As she spoke, she displayed the demeanour of someone who was literally, physically carrying someone on her back. She had a small, thin, fragile frame and was hunched over throughout the conversation. Her weariness was unmistakable, and at a point in the conversation, she became tearful. Like Vuyo, who loathed the unprofessionalism of his colleagues, she too was harassed by the continual reminders that her colleagues “*JUST DON'T GIVE A DAMN!*” about public perceptions, and even “*lie in their chairs*” as they tended to their customers.

She acknowledged that her frustration reached a level that was unbearable, and she found that the negativity she felt inside spilled over, and she *'speaks it'*. The emotions that Ronelle displayed were difficult for me to process as it seems terribly unjustifiable that someone who wanted to earn an honest day's living needed to be subjected to this abuse of sorts. I imagined my own role at my own workplace, and my own, personal mission to make every day count by trying to make improvements, and by developing and empowering others and learning constantly. If I had colleagues who took me for granted, used me for my knowledge and skills, and were protected and above the law because of who they knew in the organisation, I wondered how that would make me feel. I reflected on this for many days after this engagement, the conversation had resonated with me quite powerfully. The word that came to mind at the conclusion of this period of reflection on Ronelle's story was 'emptiness'. It was the very word that Tessa (Extract 4) had used when she said *"It has become part of who I am, to really serve with integrity, to be committed to the society. But I often experience emptiness here."* Having spent much time thinking about this, 'emptiness' is a most apt term to describe what it feels like for many of these employees who strive to do their best, but experience little to no support from their leaders or peers.

Peter, Vuyo and Ronelle's extracts firmly ensconce the premise that employees' connectedness to this organisation is being severely compromised due to legacy, democratic transition issues, and due to an entrenched and cyclical set of destructive behavioural routines that viciously threaten our progress as a nation. The dismal internal culture of public sector organisations that Franks (2015), Nengwekhulu (2009), Sindane (2008) and Theletsane (2013) describe in their writings is certainly reflected here. They write of nepotistic practices and incompetent managers hiring incompetent employees; ineffective management and performance

management practices; poor team work; negative attitudes and a culture of entitlement; and conflicting value systems bumping up against each other.

Furthermore, the unprofessionalism that the public experiences was raised here. A perceived lack of discipline, an excuses-and-blame culture (the ‘pointers’), the type of context where ‘*everything stops at lunch*’, and employees ‘*lie back in their chairs*’ while engaging with customers all point to a level of ‘sloppiness’ and unprofessionalism that is unsustainable. Hence, while Batho Pele may have been a noble strategy, its implementation on the ground has certainly not been. As stated by Songezo Mabece (2014):

When we were the toast of the world, having attained what took too unnecessarily long to achieve in 1994, words that were complimentary with the raised glasses were “dignity”, “equality” and “freedom.” In this context, at the heart of the new government that at last represented the will of the people, service and service delivery would be hallmarks of a successful transition from oppression to liberation. The people’s resources would be entrusted to the elected representatives who had a simple mandate — *batho pele* — people first. In the very recent times, we have seen a systematic process of destroying the early gains of what that 1994 script promised. The upshot of this process has seen the dictates of *batho pele* disintegrate into mere rhetoric. Key to this swift disintegration has been the dissolution of key institutions and the creation of smokescreen counterparts, the paying of lip service to those institutions in existence, the appointment of blindly loyal persons to positions of authority, and a chronic failure to rebuke malpractice within the civil service (<http://thoughtleader.co.za/songezomabece/2014/10/23/batho-pele-we-need-servants-not-rulers/>)



Perceived organisational reputation emerges quite strongly in this section. Employees and customers engage in a reciprocal relationship here, one of discontent where each shapes the experiences of the other. Negativity begets negativity, as each expects the worst of the other, therefore, employees display those behaviours that are the very antithesis of Batho Pele, and customers have come to expect nothing less, which all feeds into a vicious cycle that lends itself to an atrocious reputational landscape. Employees are the bedrock of organisational reputation, hence when Ronelle said, *“So you manage to keep it together for a long time, but eventually you get to a point where you feel like you can’t handle this anymore. And then you start speaking that negativity outside of this place”* it is very telling as it speaks to this very reciprocity of discontent that has oozed beyond the boundaries of the organisation, creating an infected reputation.

#### **6.2.1.4 Voters vote for mafias: corruption and self-interest reigns supreme**

The next two extracts provide an explanation of how corruption is not something that just occurs in a clandestine manner in the higher echelons of government, but has become quite detectable on the ground, in the daily lives of ‘ordinary’ employees.

Bheki, a 40 year old African male in Support Services provided a caustic account of nepotism and the hiring of incompetent staff, tender malpractices, unethical labour broking practices, and the perception that the politicians are at the very centre of the corruption in the City.

**Simi:**                    **What do you mean that this is where ‘the problems come in’?**

Bheki:                    This is where the problems come in and unqualified people are brought in. They do not deliver, there is a lot of favouritism in the government sector. Reputation is at stake. Government is not an ‘individual’. The citizens of the country govern the country because WE VOTED FOR THESE PEOPLE (emphatic, appears frustrated). *VOTERS VOTE FOR MAFIAS!* The very same people who are supposed to deliver become bosses.

It's a contradiction. You can't have a voice with such people. Now, departments like [names department] that are supposed to issue or adhere to their policies in issuing tenders – if the Director is told by the Municipality which company should be given a tender, because that is happening – it then means unqualified and inexperienced people will then get the tenders. If Simi and Bheki have a company and it reaches all the requirements, they appoint us. We then go and outsource a company and pay them out. THAT IS KNOWN! (Angry). That is fraud and corruption. THAT IS KILLING THE ORGANISATION! Then, there is this labour brokering in public sector. Who owns these labour brokers? Obviously, it's politicians (sniggers sarcastically). Are they honest in doing this? They are not honest. So it means the voters vote for mafias. *THEY ARE ONLY WORKING FOR THEMSELVES, NOT TO BETTER THE LIVES OF THE CITIZENS OF THE COUNTRY!*

**(Extract 10)**

Bheki did not mince his words in stating that “*VOTERS VOTE FOR MAFIAS!*” During the discussion, I found that his description of the ‘*mafia*’ was redolent of the classic organised crime films, like ‘The Godfather’ and ‘Goodfellas’. Within these mafia circles, there was a blind loyalty to the ‘clan’, the infliction of fear upon those who did not comply with the will of the crime bosses, and an overwhelming sense of danger and dark, sinister forces.

Bheki's description therefore spoke to the intensity of his feelings towards those who instigated and cultivated corruption at the City. To him, they were nothing more than dangerous ‘crime bosses’ who exercised nepotism, favouritism, and cronyism for personal gain and thus operated under a dark cloud. According to Bheki, “*THEY ARE ONLY WORKING FOR THEMSELVES, NOT TO BETTER THE LIVES OF THE CITIZENS OF THE COUNTRY!*” The result of this is brutal, as if when you are involved with the mafia, death is a certainty, hence fraud and corruption “*...IS KILLING THE ORGANISATION!*” He was emphatic when he said

that “*Government is not an ‘individual’*” as it speaks to the personal gain that is being sought at the expense of citizens who voted politicians into power in order to deliver on their needs.

Zarina, a 57 year old Indian female in Support Services also spoke of the corruption and nepotism that seemed to have become more prevalent over the past few years, and like Bheki, of politicians who appeared to be fixated on self-gain rather than improving the lives of citizens who were desperately seeking basic services.

**Simi:**                   **So you are saying that the City is being compromised? How?**

Zarina:               Simi, when I think of what is happening within the City (.). Ratepayers’ money is getting spent in the wrong way, you know. I mean every year you hear there is a rate hike, ratepayers have to cough up the money. But when working in the City you see how much wastage there is. Like even the salaries – some people in the City are earning WAY above what the market pays, you know. There is a lot of wastage. When you see what is happening it just upsets you (looks depressed and contemplative). What I can say is, it affects you. You as a ratepayer can see where your money is going. And this is something you cannot just let out to the public. But if the public had to know about it, it would have a bad impact, you know. But I guess it’s happening in all of government as well, in parliament too, you know. All the corruption.

**Simi:**                   **Can you tell me more about the corruption you speak of?**

Zarina:               The CORRUPTION! (Giggles nervously). I mean, how do people get into those roles? It’s ‘who they know’. It’s been happening a lot, currently it’s happening a lot more than previously - unless it was happening before and we didn’t know about it. But now I see it with my own eyes. The community wants assistance and then you have to go to a politician for this and that, and you don’t know if the politicians are there for self-gain or whether they are there for the people. It’s so sad when you see the lack of service delivery, especially for the poor, like when people have problems with their billing queries. They go to Jorissen Place or to Thuso House and they have to wait a WHOLE day. Sometimes their turn doesn’t even come in the queue and they have to come the next

day. So it's not helping them you know...you can't even make appointments. The politicians seem to be involved, but NOT with improvements.

**(Extract 11)**

Zarina was perturbed by what she perceived as massive wastage in the City, where ratepayers' money was being mismanaged, for example, in the form of inflated salaries for many employees in the City. This situation clearly elicited an emotional reaction from Zarina, and at a certain point in the discussion she became very pensive and looked quite depressed. She also spoke of the poor who queued up for lengthy periods of time, sometimes an entire day, without having their billing queries resolved. Then, they were forced to return the next day. It was quite a miserable image that was conjured – of the destitute in society, perhaps travelling long distances to queue up for services that they may not receive. It reminded me of how the vulnerable, helpless and disempowered struggle with their basic needs in our society every single day.

It is evident, yet again, that there is a conflictual situation that arises for employees of the City, who are both citizens *and* public servants. This dilemma of 'overlapping memberships' was expressed by Zarina when she stated, *"What I can say is, it affects you. You as a ratepayer can see where your money is going. And this is something you cannot just let out to the public. But if the public had to know about it, it would have a bad impact, you know."* Being caught up in this tension of being 'inside' and 'outside' the organisation must certainly create discomfort for employees of government institutions. Zarina tried to 'normalise' the situation and perhaps diminish her discomfort at the corruption and excess that she had borne witness to, *"But I guess it's happening in all of government as well, in parliament too, you know. All the corruption!"* I was quite moved during this moment by Zarina's vulnerability and how earnest she was during

this discussion. It dawned on me that many employees of the City must carry significant psychological burdens as a result of these corrupt practices.

Section 3.5.3 on corruption in the South African public service reiterated how it has become a blight on our society. As stated by Quintal (2016), the African edition of the Global Corruption Barometer (GCB) that was released in December 2015, revealed that 83% of South Africans who were polled believed that corruption was increasing, and 79% believed that government was ineffective at curtailing corruption. Ordinary South Africans citizens who were polled viewed “...prominent political and public and private sector leaders at all levels continuing to loot their towns, provinces and national government on a grand scale and getting away with it” (<http://mg.co.za/article/2016-01-27-sa-moves-five-places-on-corruption-perception-index>). Gumede (2016) believes that the widespread nature of corruption in government has almost ‘normalised’ corrupt behaviours. He states the following:

Corruption should be declared a national emergency. This would mean ending the dangerous defensiveness, and in some cases denialism, prevalent in some government and political circles over the high level of corruption. The governing ANC needs to clean up and demonstrate the power of setting an example, by legally, socially and politically punishing the bad behaviour of its leaders and members. Senior party leaders, ministers and public servants who are corrupt, even if they are powerful, must be held accountable. Only if that is done publicly will the government regain the moral authority to deal credibly with transgressions by ordinary citizens. (<http://democracyworks.org.za/uproot-pervasive-corruption/>)

It is evident that corruption and its pervasiveness are experienced on the same scale by citizens and employees of the City – they are, after all, the same population. However, it does

provide unique complexities for employees, who by virtue of being in the system navigate an awkward and vulnerable path in the City, characterised by much discomfort, tension and unease.

#### **6.2.1.5 The nemesis of the billing crisis**

The extracts below provide a sense of the frustration and disdain that these employees felt regarding what has come to be known as the ‘billing crisis’ at the City of Johannesburg. In 2009, Project Phakama was implemented to convert various fragmented systems into an integrated SAP technology platform with the aim of enhancing metered services, billing, collections, and payments for the public. The intent was also for all accounts to be centralised into one billing system (Mawson, 2011). According to Mawson (2015), the City is still nursing a “billing hangover”

([http://www.itweb.co.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=140841](http://www.itweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=140841)). She further states, “The seemingly never-ending billing crisis is thanks to post-implementation issues with the R580 billion Project Phakama – a move to put all disparate departments on one SAP platform – which led to 80 000 complaints about grossly-inflated readings and inaccurate bills” ([http://www.itweb.co.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=140841](http://www.itweb.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=140841)).

In the two extracts below, the participants expressed how a perceived lack of political will to address the issues that customers experience, and an inherent ‘denialism’, has created an ongoing problem at the City, as well as very poor perceptions of the City overall. Customers often asked these employees to become personally involved in resolving their queries, some of which had spanned years, even though they were not involved in the functioning of the Billing Department. This has created much negativity and anger amongst both employees and the citizens they serve.

Grace, a 54 year old African female in a citizen-facing function was filled with anger and resentment at the fact that six years after the implementation of the billing system, a shroud of mistrust and negativity still surrounded the billing processes at the City.

**Simi:**           **You say there are challenges, Grace. Can you explain what these are?**

Grace:           Yes. Mostly it's on the revenue side. You know, you are in a gathering, you meet people and you say 'I work in the City', everybody assumes that you are part of the billing problems. And EVERYBODY tells you their problems. (Scoffs). They say 'My account hasn't been resolved' or this and that (.). THAT'S the part that kills you. You become ashamed to actually announce that you work in the City. Because you get all this negative stuff and emotions back (.) and queries that you yourself have as an employee with your own account. This billing thing has really caused a lot of damage and rot in this system. People outside can't see past this.

**Simi:**           **Do you think there is the possibility that this can improve or be resolved?**

Grace:           *Eish.* I don't know Simi. What can we say about that? It [the topic] has been circling around for how many years? I don't know. They [leaders in the City] keep saying we are almost there but who knows what to believe in this place.

**(Extract 12)**

Grace stated that the matter of the billing crisis “...*has been circling around*” for years with the result that even in her personal networks, she encountered people who had billing queries. This caused her to feel ashamed of her association with the City and it is the type of negativity that “*kills you*”. The depth of Grace's frustration was clearly evident when she used these words, and the extent of her fatigue with regard to the situation was discernible. Her voice sounded hoarse and tired, and I really felt compassion for her predicament.

Furthermore, Grace presented the reciprocity of reputation so clearly in her statement, “...*you get all this negative stuff and emotions back (.) and queries that you yourself have as an*

*employee with your own account. This billing thing has really caused a lot of damage and rot in this system. People outside can't see past this.*" The inside-outside dynamic, which is so pertinent to the concept of perceived organisational reputation, is clearly witnessed here with regard to the billing troubles in the City. Employees are just as affected as the citizens of the City are, and as such, the negativity of these two stakeholder groups feed into each other. The added complexity, yet again, is a matter of 'overlapping memberships' as employees of the City are also citizens, as mentioned earlier. This dilemma was illustrated when Grace stated that employees themselves had queries regarding their accounts. When she ended this particular piece with "*...who knows what to believe in this place*" I was acutely aware of the absolute helplessness that accompanies any talk of the billing crisis in the City.

This helplessness certainly surfaced again in Ronelle's extract. As referenced in an earlier extract in Section 6.2.1.3 ('Pointers always blaming others: the City's lack of team cohesion and peer support'), where she featured, Ronelle is a 45 year old White female in a citizen-facing role.

**Simi:**                    **What do you mean that no one is taking accountability for the billing crisis?**

Ronelle:                Well, I feel that the City actually denies that there is a billing crisis. But if you look at it as a whole, with all the queries that there is (sic) and all the billing that is being done incorrectly, all the cut-offs that are being done incorrectly. Then SURELY there must be a billing crisis! You even get people that (sic) call me personally, trying to get help because they just don't get help, even if they log a call. You know, they wait for YEARS to get a query solved. And so it definitely makes the City look bad. And even though you work in a different department, people don't think of it like that. If they hear that you work for the City of Johannesburg all they see are water and electricity and billing problems. Because that is basically what they deal with. So for them it's like, you know, you are working at a useless institution.



**Simi:**                    **And so what is the outcome of this?**

Ronelle:                Even though they keep working on it and say that they are trying to resolve it, that it has improved, it doesn't look like it. If you look at all the stuff [the queries] that come in, and all the negative publicity, it doesn't really seem that they are getting to the main problem and getting it sorted out. It seems like a lost cause and it angers the citizens of the City. It also angers me because for how long must we hear them sing the same song? If someone was determined to fix this situation, it would be fixed, right?

**(Extract 13)**

The feelings of shame that Grace expressed are also evident in Ronelle's statement, when she said that because of the billing crisis, the perception in the public domain was that *"...you are working at a useless institution."* Yet, there appears to be a denial of these problems in her opinion – *"Well, I feel that the City actually denies that there is a billing crisis."* Furthermore, like Grace, who indicated that *"People outside can't see past this,"* Ronelle felt that regardless of the fact that she did not work for Billing directly, customers asked her for assistance. This was clear when she stated, *"And even though you work in a different department, people don't think of it like that. If they hear that you work for the City of Johannesburg all they see are water and electricity and billing problems."*

This concurs with the point raised in Section 3.2 regarding the unique complexities that public sector institutions face relative to the private sector. Often, stakeholders are oblivious to the complexities in the public sector and the multiplicity of role players and how they interface. As such, and as highlighted in Section 3.2, *"...they pass judgments that are culturally, economically, politically and socially consequential – about what they and others perceive as unified entities responsible for outcomes"* (Carpenter & Krause, 2012, p. 29). This further exacerbates the "bad apple effects" that occur when a poor reputation spreads from one public

sector entity, which has committed an impropriety, to another (p. 29). Hence, for Grace and Ronelle, there is no escape from this “stickiness” of reputation (Mahon & Mitnick, 2010, p. 280).

The reciprocal exchange of anger and frustration in these employees’ dealings with customers was evidenced when Ronelle stated, *“It seems like a lost cause and it angers the citizens of the City. It also angers me because for how long must we hear them sing the same song?”* It is evident that contrary to what public officials continuously reiterate in the media about the crisis being resolved, employees believe that this is far from the truth and feel besieged by the constant scrutiny they are subjected to from the public.

#### **6.2.1.6 At the mercy of the politicians: political interference in the running of departments**

Eight participants (53%) raised the topic of undue political interference in their conversations. It certainly has been a topical matter in South African politics. The National Development Plan (National Planning Commission, 2012) outlined the challenges experienced in local government due to the political interference experienced in both technical and administrative decision-making. At senior levels in government, the Commission indicated that there has been far-reaching political interference in the recruitment and selection processes for senior staff, which has resulted in much instability, lowered staff morale, and citizens losing faith in government. They reiterated the need for “...a public service immersed in the development agenda but insulated from undue political interference” (National Planning Commission, 2012, p. 71).

Two extracts below speak to the impact of undue political interference. The first extract is from Irene, a 49 year old White female in Support Services. She spoke of the empty promises

and “*political meddling*” that made functioning in her role really difficult due to the unrealistic expectations that citizens have of employees of the City.

**Simi:**                **So you are saying that sometimes the community expects too much from the City?**

Irene:                What I mean, Simi, is that there’s (sic) a lot of people that’s (sic) expecting too much because of promises that have been made.

**Simi:**                **By who?**

Irene:                POLITICIANS! (Flustered, irritated). And...it will NEVER materialise. So their [the community’s] view will never change because they were promised things for, you know, election purposes. It’s just how it works in this place (says this quietly and wearily). It really makes it difficult for us. That political meddling. It makes our jobs hard on the ground, especially the people dealing with these customers. You can’t always deliver what was promised. There’s no way you can give everyone free stuff, whatever, you know. But that’s what they are expecting because it is what was promised to them. Do you blame them? I don’t. *It’s a helpless situation these politicians are putting us in.*

**Simi:**                **So how do you handle this then?**

Irene:                But that’s what I am saying – we don’t handle it. These politicians make their ridiculous promises that we all know will never materialise, and the people WANT to believe them and NEED to believe them and it’s just a bunch of nothing. They have no understanding of our challenges, the work we do, the things we face, but to look good, they make promises ON OUR BEHALF! It makes me so angry and helpless. So, to answer your question, we just live at the mercy of the next thing they will say to line their own pockets or give someone else a job here. Someone who can’t even do the job, most of the time.

**(Extract 14)**

It is therefore a “*helpless situation*” according to Irene. She further expressed that she felt quite angry, vulnerable and disempowered by the experience. This came through strongly

when she spoke of living “...*at the mercy of the next thing they will say to line their own pockets or give someone else a job here.*” Politicians preying on the desperation of those who are in dire need in the communities comes to the fore, but it amounts to “...*a bunch of nothing.*” Irene also raised the issues of nepotism and politicians hiring incompetent staff.

Irene’s points were quite a revelation to me, as prior to this discussion, I had never really contemplated how political meddling could jeopardise jobs ‘on the ground’. In the public realm, in many instances, we imagine this type of political interference to occur high up in political ranks and strategic circles. However, Irene alerted me to the fact that while this may be true, it does filter down to cause immense tumult in the jobs of ‘ordinary’ employees in government, who feel that their delivery is compromised.

Nepotistic hiring practices were also mentioned by Tessa, the 48 year old White female from Support Services whose previous extract featured in Section 6.2.1.1 (‘The deafening silence of absent leaders: the leadership void in the City’). She explained how politicians dictate that certain people should be hired when they lack the competencies for the job.

**Simi:**                    **So you have excellent policies in the City, but there’s a problem with their implementation?**

**Tessa:**                    Sometimes, you know what else is difficult? I think in local government, in terms of the governance structures, it’s difficult. It’s due to the fact that we have got (sic) political influences impacting on officials. So therefore sometimes you will have the best of policies in place because I believe the City has got (sic) excellent policies. But in terms of the execution, it becomes a problem because, due to political interference, you will be told ‘Ok, you will need to appoint Person X in this position’ knowing that ‘Person X’ doesn’t have the relevant competencies, you know, in all aspects pertaining to that occupational level. It’s a bad, bad situation. We feel like we have our hands tied here.

**Simi:**           **Tell me more?**

Tessa:           It's a helpless situation, it means that we can work TIRELESSLY and the fruits of our labour go nowhere. It means we are stuck with 'bosses' (makes an 'inverted commas' sign with her hands) who are not interested in anyone but themselves.

**(Extract 15)**

Hence, Tessa felt that employees of the City, who demonstrated unflagging efforts to progress the City, had 'their hands tied' as they had to contend with 'bosses' who had little regard for the City's improvement and success, and more for their own personal enrichment. A combination of the hollow promises made to communities, which result in mismatched expectations, and therefore anger from citizens, and the unethical deployment of incompetent managers in the City who are perceived to be wholly ill-equipped to deliver optimally on the City's service delivery mandate is a recipe for disaster. In fact, this toxic cocktail of factors features political interference at its very centre, and in the extracts above, the participants were extremely overt about it.

It dawned on me during these conversations that these factors contribute immensely to service delivery protests in the country. For the majority, the previously marginalised citizens of South Africa, democracy offered freedoms that were long denied to them. However, their expectations have certainly not been met, due largely to the matters raised in the two extracts above and the deep anger and frustration that this has elicited. As stated by Mpehle (2012), service delivery protests are understandable for the following reasons:

...while millions still live under appalling conditions and do not enjoy the fruits of democracy, the chosen few reap the benefit of Black Economic Empowerment, which was supposed to do good to ordinary citizens who were previously disadvantaged, while

others who are in power involve themselves in corruption and nepotism which manifests in the abuse of the tender system and the appointment of friends and relatives, respectively, which robs millions of citizens of their right to quality service delivery. (p. 224)

Many South Africans are reaching the end of their tether and trying to galvanise change, but it often takes place in the form of violent protests. Alexander (2010) describes the character of this protest culture in South Africa as follows:

Since 2004, South Africa has experienced a movement of local protests amounting to a rebellion of the poor. This has been widespread and intense, reaching insurrectionary proportions in some cases. On the surface, the protests have been about service delivery and against uncaring, self-serving, and corrupt leaders of municipalities. A key feature has been mass participation by a new generation of fighters, especially unemployed youth but also school students. Many issues that underpinned the ascendancy of Jacob Zuma also fuel the present action, including a sense of injustice arising from the realities of persistent inequality. (p. 25)

#### **6.2.1.7 A log around our necks: the inherent contradiction of a ‘World Class African City’**

Seven participants (47%) spoke of the perceived contradiction of the City’s tagline – ‘A World Class African City’. They were not alone in these views as there has been contentious media coverage regarding this matter. In July 2013, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) ruled that an advertisement run by the City of Johannesburg using the ‘World Class African City’ branding was misleading, given that the City had been the recipient of three qualified

audits by the Auditor General and had written off revenue to the sum of R12 billion (Clarke, 2013). A few months later, this ruling was overturned and the City was given permission to continue with this branding.

The matter, however, sparked dialogue about what exactly constitutes ‘world class’. It has raised questions on how to define ‘world class’, who it serves and in what context this occurs. Hence, ‘world class’ in India and Europe is very different to ‘world class’ in Africa, and even South Africa, given our vastly different sociological and contextual factors (Gurney, 2012). As stated by Gurney, this tagline may be “...more about being an African power player” (<http://www.cityscapesdigital.net/2013/05/09/a-visionary-statement/>). However, she also concedes that a lack of ideological clarity on the definition of ‘world class’ and ‘African’ has created a chasm with regard to how people pursue these goals on the ground. There is, therefore, a disconnect between the strategic vision and its practical implementation.

This idea seemed to resonate with the sentiments expressed in the following two extracts. There was a great deal of cynicism and sarcasm expressed regarding the ‘World Class African City’ tagline. John, the 52 year old White male from Support Services who featured in an earlier extract in Section 6.2.1.1 (‘The deafening silence of absent leaders: the leadership void in the City’), felt that the brand had become constraining, and heavy with the weight of expectations that he believed the City simply could not meet. He used the very vivid imagery of the brand being “...*a big log around our necks.*” This image was very apt in creating the heavy, burdensome and encumbered feeling that he wished to impart.

**Simi:** Can you tell me what you mean when you say that the ‘branding is problematic’ in the City?

**John:** We went with a ‘World Class African City’. Unfortunately in some ways that has become a big log around our necks. To say a ‘World Class African City’? You know, I would

have said ‘Aspiring to be a World Class African City’, ‘On the way to being a World Class African City’. To say that you ARE a World Class African City has become quite damaging because you have nowhere to hide. You are held to that standard. The intentions were good, concept was lovely, but in the practical realm of reputation management and public relations, customer care and everything else, it is quite problematic.

**Simi:**           **So you are saying the employees of the City don’t see this as either motivating or inspiring?**

John:           Simi, let’s get real. When you see all that we see in this place on a daily basis, this ‘World Class African City’ brand becomes laughable. To be frank, it’s embarrassing. No one has faith in this brand or the people who created it – so it [the brand] won’t have ‘legs’. It just feels heavy, like a burden.

**(Extract 16)**

In the City audaciously declaring itself a ‘World Class African City’, John felt that there was “*nowhere to hide*.” This is an interesting statement as it once again alludes to feelings of shame and even humiliation, as if one must hide from the shenanigans in the City so as not to be blemished by them. The ideological ambiguity surrounding the branding that was mentioned earlier is also referenced when John says, “*The intentions were good, concept was lovely, but in the practical realm of reputation management and public relations, customer care and everything else, it is quite problematic*” as it is evident here that the ‘goalpost’, and expectations of the City, were not entirely clear.

Furthermore, John expressed the deep cynicism and lack of credibility that this branding has as he said that it was “*laughable*” and “*embarrassing*.” As those who have introduced and endorsed the brand lack credibility, it is difficult for the brand to truly resonate throughout the



organisation, and for it to gain a sound following amongst employees. It does not have the “legs” to gain the traction required, and “*It just feels heavy, like a burden.*”

This cynicism reverberated through the conversation with Emma, a 57 year old White female in a citizen-facing role. She was deeply frustrated and irritated and sighed deeply while speaking of how a “‘*World Class City*’ is *REALLY* far away.” When she said “‘*Bapele*’, ‘*Batho Peelee*’, *whatever*”, it was in a disparaging, disrespectful manner, as she mocked the words ‘Batho Pele’ as if to show her contempt and disgust at how the City is trying to “...*fool the public*” about being a world class organisation.

**Simi:**                    **You don’t believe that the City is responsive to citizens then?**

Emma:                    (Sighs deeply). ‘*Bapele*’, ‘*Batho Peelee*’, *whatever* (sic). You know to build up our image and make it a ‘World Class City’ is *REALLY* far away. We are THIRD and FOURTH grade, we are NOT world class. I’M SORRY, we are not there yet! (Sighs deeply). We not there yet. DEFINITELY NOT! I don’t know. There’s (sic) too many things going wrong. I said a lot of negative things but I speak the truth. The only thing we can try and do is improve and not fool the public that we are World Class. WORLD CLASS! Give me a break man! (Scoffs)

**(Extract 17)**

I noted during the engagements with both John and Emma that the branding was probably crafted for the City with good intentions in an attempt to elevate its status as a burgeoning metropolis, and to mobilise energy around a somewhat lofty ideal. However, the reciprocity of reputation invariably emerges yet again in this context. The dynamic interplay amongst identity, image, and reputation is once again demonstrated. As positioned in Section 2.4 on the definitional aspects of reputation, ‘identity’ refers to what employees perceive, feel, and think

about their organisation; ‘image’, is a business resource that is used by the organisation to communicate externally, and ‘reputation’ refers to outsiders’ perceptions of the organisation.

Given the negativity that these employees communicated and imparted about the City, organisational identity is certainly compromised within the City. Hence, when the branding vehicle of the ‘World Class African City’ is positioned publicly to cultivate the image of the City, it contradicts both employee experiences (identity aspects) and outsider perceptions (reputation). This is because there is an inherent disjuncture between the notion of a ‘World Class African City’ and what employees and citizens really feel about the health and effectiveness of the City. Taken a step further in exploring the role of perceived organisational reputation, which refers to employees beliefs about how outsiders view their organisation, it is evident that the negativity becomes a self-perpetuating phenomenon. It seeps into the psyche of the organisation, feeds into the public domain, and creates the dynamic interplay that yet again solidifies reputation as “...a socially shared impression – a collective construct – because it relies on an individual's perception of how other people view the firm” (Helm, 2011, p. 657-658). As such, it is patently clear that the branding of a ‘World Class African City’ is not an innocuous piece of marketing – it has called into question matters of identity, image and reputation.

### **6.3 Unique Narratives on the Reasons for Negative Perceived Organisational Reputation**

Two unique narratives emerged from three participants in the study. The first speaks to the negative, perpetuating cycle of history repeating itself in the new political regime; and the second to the cutting-edge practices that the City both explores and employs in the spirit of

progress and innovation – yet these receive little ‘airtime’. These will be further unpacked in this section.

### 6.3.1 A perpetuating cycle: history repeats itself

Hoosen, a 45 year old Indian male in Support Services raised an interesting and thought-provoking theory in our conversation. He described the characteristics of the City – slow turnaround times, lethargy, and the lack of an action orientation. He felt that these negative characteristics were pervasive and had always been there. Hoosen stated “...*it runs deep and has always been this way. In the old regime and in the new one.*” However he raised an important, new angle regarding the reciprocity of reputation – he suggested that citizens of the City had “*evolved*” to cater to these inadequacies.

Hoosen: We are slow in the City, Simi. The impact of this is very commonly known – we take too long to resolve issues, we are looked at as lethargic, the turnaround times are way too long, it runs deep and has always been this way. In the old regime and the new one. In fact, citizens of a Local Authority, they go through an evolutionary process.

Simi: **What do you mean?**

Hoosen: It’s fascinating. I have picked this up over the years that I have worked here. I worked in many departments. I worked here in the old regime and in the new regime. So you see the trends. And it’s all the same regardless of who’s in power. It’s all the same. You find that because we don’t work on reputation and the image of the brand and perceptions out there and such things, the citizens of local government, they evolve. You come out of your schooling, your matric. Then you go to varsity, and that’s the only time a citizen really knows what a Local Authority [local government entity] is. You don’t know who we are because your parents would take care of all Local Authority issues, there’s no reason for you to come to Local Authority. There is no reason for a young person to be involved in Local Authority, so you find that parents will be interacting a lot with us. It

would be your bills, it would be the fact that no one picked up the dirt, and that's where you get to know us. And then you get involved in this machinery. So this young individual then gets married, the first time he interacts with Local Authority, he buys a property. Or buys a car. Now you get involved in the machinery where you must go for a licence. In fact that's a better example, you finish matric or you are in matric and you must go for your Learners' Licence. And from Day One you walk into a very cold environment, an environment that only sees another number in front of them. They don't look at the anxiety this young person is going through. They don't understand that what this person is about to go through will change their life forever. A learners' licence, a driver's licence changes your life forever. But there is no empathy. THERE'S NO EMPATHY. So your evolution starts the first time you come here. You see this cold environment and you may complain. But because you complain and it's not going anywhere, and you are too scared to complain because of your age, you then accept what's happening. And slowly the more you interact with us, your evolution continues. You accept that this is how things are. Eventually, when you come to us with your queries, you have already prepared yourself to sit in the queue to wait, and not have it resolved within one month. You become apathetic. You have already prepared yourself for a year's resolution. The citizens of Johannesburg tend to evolve to cater for us. It's something that is handed down to the next generation.

**Simi:**            **You are saying this is a cycle?**

**Hoosen:**        A perpetuating cycle. ABSOLUTELY!

**(Extract 18)**

Hoosen, through his tenure of more than 20 years in the City, observed a phenomenon where citizens had been 'schooled' to expect poor service, which creates apathy amongst them. As described by Nengwekhulu (2009), the Weberian public service model, which was intact for decades in South Africa prior to the advent of democracy, was epitomised by its impersonal, rigid, hierarchical and mechanical nature. According to him, public service retains these

characteristics today, characteristics that are diametrically opposed to Batho Pele principles. Hence, it makes sense that Hoosen, through his long career, would have experienced these characteristics quite strongly.

He noted the central role that the City plays in the life of a citizen. He described the trajectory of a citizen's growth and development, and certain key milestones in their life, for example, when they seek a driver's licence, or buy a car or a property and become involved "*...in the machinery*" of the City. The word 'machinery' portrays the mechanical and impersonal nature of the engagement. As the 'youngster' interacts with the City, she does not feel confident enough to question the poor service rendered to her, and just accepts the situation. The absolute lack of empathy is captured when Hoosen stated, "*And from Day One you walk into a very cold environment, an environment that only sees another number in front of them. They don't look at the anxiety this young person is going through. They don't understand that what this person is about to go through will change their life forever.*" A stark image was presented here of a youngster on the cusp of life's possibilities, entering an exciting, fresh phase of their life, which was juxtaposed with the monolithic, cold and impersonal edifice that is the City.

Hence, according to Hoosen, the citizens of the City evolve to cater to its inadequacies – "*The citizens of Johannesburg tend to evolve to cater for us*", and through ongoing interactions with the City, become apathetic and grow to believe that this is 'just the way things are'. Hoosen made the observation that this is "*a perpetuating cycle*" that is handed down from one generation to another. The reciprocity of reputation is yet again depicted here, the complex and dynamic coaction between insiders (employees) and outsiders (citizens) – perhaps this 'evolutionary process' that Hoosen describes is actually perceived organisational reputation in all its complex dynamism. It is certainly plausible that over the years, through a 'loaded' public

sector legacy, negative and dissatisfied employees of the City have influenced the perceptions of customers, who have come to expect poor service, and who have, in turn, further exacerbated the negativity of employees due to customers always expecting the worst. They have each fed into a vicious cycle of negativity.

Hoosen's idea, however, is that citizens' negativity and poor expectations are manifested as apathy, which is an idea that I pondered for a lengthy period of time. We often witness service delivery protests and community agitators for change who feel like they must fight for a voice and a place in South African society. However, equally prevalent are the millions of citizens who do *not* agitate for change, who feel vulnerable and helpless, who feel that they have no choice but to 'put up' with the service they receive from the government. I spent many afternoons walking through the City's buildings, and witnessed numerous people from all walks of life, all waiting patiently for help in queues that seemed to have no end. Most of them looked tired, defeated, and with a glazed look. I thought that perhaps Hoosen had a point.

This also raises the question of active citizenry in the county. As stated in the National Development Plan:

Active citizenry and social activism is necessary for democracy and development to flourish. The state cannot merely act on behalf of the people – it has to act with the people, working together with other institutions to provide opportunities for the advancement of all communities. All sectors of society, including the legislatures and judiciary, have to ensure that the fruits of development accrue to the poorest and most marginalised, offsetting possible attempts by elites to protect their own interests at the expense of less powerful communities. (National Planning Commission, 2012, p. 37)

The National Planning Commission also stressed the various avenues available to mobilise active citizenry, such as ward committees, school governing bodies, and policing forums, but also noted that, “Despite these avenues, there is growing distance between citizens and the government” (p. 37). Moeti (2013) cautions us against taking the term ‘active citizenry’ at face value without interrogating what it means and stands for. While she concedes that passivity is not an option, she encourages South African society to unpack the agendas that underpin the term ‘active citizenry,’ for example, the unhealthy notions that dialogue can only occur in English, that only certain vehicles like ‘workshops’ are feasible for such dialogue, and that it is only the educated who can make a meaningful contribution to active citizenry. She points out that active citizenry, unless clearly understood and embraced, can further entrench marginalising, hegemonic practices. Hence, perhaps the millions of South Africans who, in Hoosen’s view, have evolved to accept the City’s shortcomings are in fact those who are not yet exposed and attuned to the power of true active citizenry, and have therefore not found their voice. It is logical to see how this can become a self-perpetuating cycle as he has suggested. After speaking with Hoosen, I was left with the thought that, ‘the more things change, the more they stay the same’. Perhaps that is the hidden, unspoken political reality in the City.

### **6.3.2 Competing with perceptions: ‘good-news’ is obliterated**

The second, unique narrative that surfaced was related to the City’s efforts to make vast improvements, yet these went unnoticed by the public. Grace, the 54 year old African female in a citizen-facing role, who featured in Section 6.2.1.5 (‘The nemesis of the billing crisis’), and Vuyo, the 48 year old African male in a citizen-facing role, who contributed to Section 6.2.1.3 (‘Pointers always blaming others: the City’s lack of team cohesion and peer support’) shared the exciting developments that the City had embarked on. These include improved infrastructure,

property development, and transport and recreational facilities, all aiming to create an enhanced quality of life for the citizens of Johannesburg. However, they were also disappointed by the fact that citizens' attention to, and acknowledgement of these initiatives had not really been achieved as they focused more on the negative aspects of non-delivery.

Grace discussed the improvements that the City was making in an animated fashion. She rattled off all the exciting ventures that were underway. However, she was clear that the citizens did not focus on these. Instead, *"They just see a mess. They don't see the good that the City is doing."*

**Simi:**                **So you are saying that the City does do a lot, and this goes unnoticed?**

Grace:                YES, YES! They just see a mess. They don't see the good that the City is doing. LOOK AT THE INFRASTRUCTURE! Look at the IMPROVEMENTS that are around Joburg! There's *A LOT, THERE'S A LOT!* And the improvement that they are actually doing (sic) with buildings. There is an area that is around Westgate (.), you've got bachelor flats there which are situated in a very, very upcoming (sic) market. Look at Braamfontein. The properties here (.) there is so much improvement. The infrastructure that the City has created is great. You have parks that have gyms. You know they have machines that people use to gym and do some exercise, playgrounds and all that. Even old ladies, they are exercising, they are playing soccer, they are very active. What this means is that it is actually prolonging their lives. But Simi, HOW CAN ANYONE KNOW THIS IF ALL THEY SEE IS A MESS? It makes them blind to possibilities and hope.

**Simi:**                **How do you make them see this then?**

Grace:                *Eish* Simi, I don't know (speaks wearily and slowly). It's just hard to show success when there's non-delivery. People will see the negative stuff first, it's human nature. It's also basic human needs. People are suffering, so these things are often overlooked. Most of them are not even working (sic). I mean, I'll make (sic) an example. My mother is staying in Soweto, she is living there by herself with my brother who is HIV-positive. So there's



no income besides the normal, monthly pension funds they get. And if you look at Soweto, it's old ladies looking after grandchildren, their kids are not there anymore, they [their children] are trying to make a living, or they have died from AIDS (looks sad and tired).

**(Extract 19)**

Grace felt that regardless of the energy that the City channeled into making such improvements, the public would remain oblivious to these given the perceived 'messiness', and therefore, *"It makes them blind to possibilities and hope."* Given that people are struggling with the most basic of needs in our country, according to Grace, *"It's just hard to show success when there's non-delivery."* Grace became quite weary and tired, and less animated when she transitioned to the example of her own family, and talked about her mother who lived with her HIV-positive brother. Both were surviving on a very meager income. Furthermore, many people in her community of Soweto struggled for survival, grandmothers were raising their grandchildren as the parents were either searching for a better life elsewhere, or had died from AIDS. Grace stated, *"And if you look at Soweto, it's old ladies looking after grandchildren, their kids are not there anymore, they [their children] are trying to make a living, or they have died from AIDS."* It was a perilous picture that was painted, and the harsh realities of how life is experienced by the poor in South Africa was so apparent.

Grace's initial vibrant description of the improvements that the City was making gave way to a sadness and weariness when she offered a view of her own family's struggles. It alerted me once again to the complicated relationship that the City's employees have with the organisation. Grace tried ardently to position positive news, but when she further explored the reasons for citizens not being enthused by these, and that her own family would probably not be either given their dire standard of living, the atmosphere in the room sobered considerably.

Vuyo was quite matter-of-fact about the infrastructural improvements and best practices that the City continued to focus on, and said that, *“Even though you will always compete with perceptions, we are still trying.”* Like Grace, Vuyo believed that *“...perceptions run thick and deep”* and gaining buy-in and support for the City’s initiatives was not an easy task. However, he was more light-hearted about this aspect.

**Simi:** **It seems you are excited by the improvements the City is making?**

Vuyo: I am (smiles broadly). We are trying to do research and compete with the international governments and what we learned overseas (.) and see whether we can move our City in that direction. Even though you will always compete with perceptions, we are still trying. If you look at *Rea Vaya* [the City’s bus service], there is no longer the stress of driving for so long. We wish our communities would use these services more, and make a shift in how they live their lives. People keep driving their cars and it costs money, and there are rate increments to maintain roads. These days, when you drive here in the City, you will see more dedicated bicycle lanes. The City is trying to shift perceptions and move in that direction but I don’t think that it is something that will happen soon, but we will keep trying to make this happen.

**Simi:** **You said the City has to ‘compete with perceptions’, Can you tell me more about this?**

Vuyo: Well, you know the perceptions run thick and deep, Simi. It’s tough to face the fact that people will always see the bad before the good, but it is not the reason to throw our hands in the air and give up (giggles). Sometimes, yes, it does make you feel disillusioned and even sad. But we are where we are, and we have to show improvements to the public, bad perceptions can become positive perceptions. It will take time though.

**(Extract 20)**

Even though the public *“...sees the bad before the good”*, Vuyo indicated that it was important to keep persevering to transform these negative perceptions. He did not impart a

defeatist tone in any of his statements, but seemed to have an acceptance of the current status in the City (“...*we are where we are*”) and that the only way to address negative perceptions was to try and change them.

However, while this is a noble view, regarding the fact that negative perceptions need to be transformed into positive ones, the literature on reputation is a bit more circumspect about how malleable poor reputations are. According to Mahon and Mitnick (2010), the more reputations are linked to strongly negative impacts, the “...greater the reputational stickiness” (p. 287) and it is less likely that this reputation will shift. They explain this as follows, “Reputations whose normative content is anchored in the community’s normative system will be difficult to modify” (p. 287).

Furthermore, in the case of the City, where good service delivery is perceived by the public to be inconsistent, it is unlikely that the more sporadic improvement ventures will gain the necessary traction. *Consistently* good performance is the essence of credible organisational reputations, and as stated by Ang and Wight (2009), “Firms that consistently perform well have stronger reputations than those firms that are less consistent in their good performance” (p. 29). They reinforce this message with the statement that “...it is only when a firm has consistent good performance as a base can its reputation be enhanced through substantial improvements in performance” (p. 30). Although their sentiments are based on their work in the private sector, conceptually, the idea fits soundly within this study as well. The implication of this is that it is quite possible that the reciprocity of reputation, where employee and customer negativity fuel each other, is contributing to the inertial nature of the consistently poor reputation that is very difficult to shift in the City. It results in reputational stickiness, and the resistance of the reputation to being altered. Mahon and Mitnick (2010) state that, “By ‘resistance’ we do not

necessarily mean active or volitional resistance, though that may occur in the setting; rather, it is in the more general sense of inertial opposition to change in the qualities nor status of the reputation” (p. 284).

## **6.4 Summary of the Chapter**

In exploring perceived organisational reputation through the stories that these employees related, the first research question addressed the recurring narratives that emerged in the interview process, while the second research question addressed those narratives that were unique to the participants. It was clear that, given employees’ negative perceived organisational reputation, their sense of organisational identification has potentially been deeply compromised.

Recurring and unique narratives revealed the reasons for the negative perceived organisational reputation. These were: a perceived ‘leadership void’ in the City; the significant fragmentation that leads to a lack of accountability; the perceived lack of team cohesion and peer support; entrenched corrupt practices in the City; the billing crisis; political interference in the running of departments; and the perceived inherent contradiction in the branding of a ‘World Class African City’.

Two unique and noteworthy narratives emerged as reasons for employees’ poor perceived organisational reputation. Firstly, the perpetuating cycle of lethargy and slow service delivery was believed to have been handed down from one generation to the next, and is a key feature of the old regime and the new regime. Citizens learn to accommodate the ‘machinery’ of the City and hence the status quo is maintained through this perpetuating cycle. Secondly, the unique narrative of ‘good news stories being obliterated’ in the City was raised. When questions of basic survival plague the majority of the citizens in the City, any attention placed on cutting-edge and novel ideas and improvements in the City is unlikely to enthuse citizens. This narrative

also points to the fact that it is difficult to shift a reputation from a low base as it has a stubborn, inertial quality, and requires consistently good performance in order to be nurtured.

## CHAPTER 7—RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: PART 2

The third research question of this study concerned the perceived impact of employees' perceived organisational reputation on their organisational identification with the City. Given the poor perceived organisational reputation experienced by the participants in this study, as clarified in the previous chapter, a significant problem is evident in this public sector context. If the premise is that employees are the bedrock of organisational reputations, and that the reputation of the South African public sector hinges on its employees, as has been suggested, then there are indeed potentially serious repercussions that could follow.

As employees' sense of self, their personal identities, and attachment and identification with the organisation hinges powerfully on their perceived organisational reputation (Dutton & Dukerich, 2013; Helm, 2011; Helm, 2013), then it is evident that these aspects have been significantly impacted given the findings in Chapter 6. This chapter will cover this aspect in greater detail.

### **7.1 The Perceived Impact on the 'I' – Conflicted selves in the City**

The elegance of the Relational Method in this study was that it provided a continuous lens through which to look at the dialogical conception of the self. In tuning my ear to the polyphonic voices of the participants, I was able to uncover narratives that emanated from unbounded selves. These narratives traversed the participants' relationships with themselves, relationships with others, and with the broader socio-cultural context. Furthermore, these were a continuous reminder of the fundamentally social nature of the self.

The consideration of contrapuntal voices, which are fundamental to the dialogical conception of the self, is also important in this chapter as these clearly express the idea of

‘conflicted selves’ in the City. The voices of the participants in this study have been richly shaped by South Africa’s legacy, and the ‘loaded’ public sector context that they have inherited and continue to mould. Hence, these voices can be in harmony or discord with each other (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Hopkins, 2011; Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Mauthner & Doucet, 2003), a vital contributing idea to the view of ‘conflicted selves’ that I position in this chapter.

As mentioned in Section 5.2, narrative is concerned with the uniqueness of a vantage point rather than its generalisable properties, although common themes and patterns are also desirable. This was certainly the stance taken in interpreting the results of this study. While I did focus on certain patterns and similarities in the previous chapter in order to illuminate how unambiguously negative perceived organisational reputation was amongst the participants, it was vitally important to pay close attention to the uniquely personal narratives impacting organisational identification. This allowed for a fresh, exploratory take on a hitherto unexplored concept, perceived organisational reputation in the public sector in South Africa.

In this chapter, I outline the threats to the participants’ organisational identification with the City, which were influenced greatly by their negative perceived organisational reputation, namely, their feelings of being silenced and oppressed; their serious discomfort with being part of a context that caused them to feel like they were betraying their democratic ideals; their feelings of persecution in their social circles due to their organisational affiliation; and the delicate boundary that they traversed in being employees of the City *and* community members. However, the existence of a strong sense of pride; and the voice of ‘believing in the destination for South Africa’ tempers the notion that their organisational identification has been completely destroyed. To the contrary, these two voices seem to keep hope alive for the participants.

### 7.1.1 Living in a bubble: feelings of being silenced

Employees' negative perceived organisational reputation and the underlying reasons for these, as elucidated in Chapter 6, seem to have resulted in employees feeling unheard, stifled, and suppressed. They felt that their voices had been silenced. Three participants offered insight into this matter, which is shown in the following three extracts from Irene, the 49 year old White female from Support Services, whose input also featured in Section 6.2.1.6 ('At the mercy of the politicians: political interference in the running of departments'); Shanti, a 38 year old Indian female from Support Services; and Bheki, a 40 year old African male from Support Services who also contributed to Section 6.2.1.4 ('Voters vote for mafias: corruption and self-interest reigns supreme').

Irene expressed feelings of anxiety, fear, and of being stifled and suppressed. She presented herself as someone grappling with terrible emotional strain.

**Simi:**               **How does all this make you feel?**

Irene:               Sometimes I just sit back and withdraw. With all the chaos in the City, I don't get involved and I have to admit, I even feel anxious. In my current role I stand back completely (.), it's not a good thing. Some people from outside see it. It creates fear in me. I don't feel I can say anything to them with everything going on here. What can I say to them? I just keep quiet. I just feel like I am in a bubble and everything is happening around me. It's like living in a bubble.

**Simi:**               **Who do you mean when you say 'people from outside'?**

Irene:               I mean the internal customers that I service in the municipality [the City], and customers from outside who visit the City and see my emotions (.). I'm sure it's not a good impression at all. But I feel like I am in a bubble. Like even if I shouted or screamed, no one would hear.

**(Extract 21)**



Irene felt that she could not talk about her feelings and that she tended to be fearful and to withdraw from her work situations and engagement with customers inside and outside the organisation – “*In my current role I stand back completely.*” She also said, “*I don’t feel I can say anything to them with everything going on here. What can I say to them?*” What this means is that she was probably not fully functional in her role. Her statement, “*I just feel like I am in a bubble and everything is happening around me. It’s like living in a bubble*” speaks to a level of detachment, withdrawal, and ‘depersonalisation’ that is quite distressing for her. She noted that “*people from outside*”, namely, her internal clients and citizens who engaged with the City, noticed her behaviour and that it probably did not result in a good impression of her.

The fact that Irene felt like she was “*living in a bubble*” speaks to a level of disassociation that is quite intense. She seemed to feel wholly disconnected from her organisation, her role and even herself, which appears to be due to an overwhelming and complex myriad of factors – the “*chaos*” that she referenced. Her extreme distress and feelings of anxiety, and of being stifled were apparent when she said, “*...even if I shouted or screamed, no one would hear.*” This sentiment indicated that she became so anxious that she verged on being panic-stricken.

Shanti spoke slowly and deliberately, and had a slight strain to her voice – I attributed this to her feeling quite stressed and, at times, angry. She spoke of the divide between leaders in the organisation and “*people on the ground*” and this echoed the feelings that the participants had about the ‘leadership void’ in the City, described in Section 6.2.1.1.

**Simi:**                    **How does all this that you have described make you feel?**

Shanti:                    Let me say this. I feel that in all the time I have been here, senior people have not communicated with people on the ground. And when people lower down communicate our voice is not heard. There were so many times when I wanted to say or express

something and I didn't. I wanted to challenge certain things that were happening, but I didn't feel I could say anything. I guess I was afraid of the consequences. I am still quiet. When I got here, it was a challenge, it was a struggle in fact, but I managed to overcome it. People who come to our department must think that I don't know how to speak or do anything! But I was overwhelmed, I had no support, I had to figure everything out by myself. I had a very rocky road. *I survived.* (Lengthy silence and contemplative).

**Simi:**           **How did you survive this?**

Shanti:           I just kept my head down and kept quiet. That's what I can say.

**(Extract 22)**

As she was anxious about the consequences of voicing her concerns or challenging the status quo, it appeared that Shanti also felt quite stifled and suppressed. In support of this, she is quoted as saying, *"And when people lower down communicate our voice is not heard. There were so many times when I wanted to say or express something and I didn't. I wanted to challenge certain things that were happening, but I didn't feel I could say anything"*.

For Shanti, who had a ten year tenure at the City, it had been a question of *"survival."* Using the word 'survival' is quite extreme, as it speaks to having to muster strength and resilience to forge through difficult challenges. Shanti also mentioned that *"People who come to our department must think that I don't know how to speak or do anything!"* Perhaps she felt that they would misinterpret her silence for incompetence or a lack of interest or passion.

She attributed her survival to the following, *"I just kept my head down and kept quiet. That's what I can say."* This description of how she has managed to survive at the City is the absolute antithesis of organisational identification, and a feeling of connectedness and oneness with the organisation. In fact, the question of survival denotes a deep incongruence of goals between Shanti and the City, metaphorically, the City had been trying to 'kill' her, and she had

made it safely out of the woods because she stayed under the radar. The level of dysfunction that this conversation elicited was truly troubling for me.

Bheki had a slightly different angle that surfaced in his conversation with me. He alluded to how ‘silenced voices’ serve dubious agendas in the City.

**Simi:                    So how do you handle these frustrations then?**

Bheki:                Look, truly speaking, in a government sector, I can only encourage people. But I have no final say. I don’t even think anyone can say something about what is going on. IT’S ALMOST LIKE EVERYONE IS DOING WHAT THEY WANT WITHOUT BEING QUESTIONED OR QUESTIONING ANYONE! I mean, even the president is not taken seriously (sniggers). Who has a voice here, Simi? Nobody except the ones up there [the City’s leaders]. So people just carry on doing the wrong things and no one addresses it. And EVERYONE outside can see what is happening here. What do we say to *THEM* if we can’t even say anything *HERE*? (Frustrated).

**(Extract 23)**

Bheki did not feel that his voice could affect change in the City as to him the problems seemed to be far too deeply entrenched, as he said, “*IT’S ALMOST LIKE EVERYONE IS DOING WHAT THEY WANT WITHOUT BEING QUESTIONED OR QUESTIONING ANYONE!*” His comment about not even the president being taken seriously once again serves as a reminder that people in the City and in the country have grown increasingly frustrated by the political affairs in the country. Hence, the silence that he raised serves an agenda, an agenda where poor leaders are enabled to continue with unethical and self-serving practices – “*Who has a voice here, Simi? Nobody except the ones up there [the City’s leaders]. So people just carry on doing the wrong things and no one addresses it.*” Furthermore, he indicated a sense of frustration as he felt that he could not ‘justify’ or explain the situation at the City to those outside the City

when internally, they were not even having honest conversations with each other and keeping each other accountable. He said, “*And EVERYONE outside can see what is happening here. What do we say to THEM if we can’t even say anything HERE?*”

In the three extracts presented in this section, it was evident that the participants had grown angry, tired, deeply frustrated, and felt powerless regarding what they had experienced at the City, but they had been ‘silenced’ – this is the epitome of a lack of identification with the organisation. Healthy communication, dialogue, and the robust sharing of opinions in an organisation is evidence of a well-functioning organisation, with employees’ committed to its continuous improvement and wellbeing. Furthermore, the dysfunctional ‘silence’ perpetuated at the City permeates beyond the boundaries of the organisation, where employees’ are unable to justify the problems to outsiders. The communication climate in an organisation is a strong signal of its organisational health. Smidts et al. (2001) find that in the context of positive perceived organisation reputation serving to concretise and enhance organisational identification, employee communication is critical. They show how employee communication actually enhances perceived organisational reputation, and consequently, augments organisational identification.

As such, Irene’s anxiety and detachment evidenced through “*living in a bubble*”, Shanti’s quest for survival in ‘keeping her head down and being quiet’, and Bheki’s anger and frustration at people who “*just carry on doing the wrong things and no one addresses it*” all point to a silencing of employees that is serving a darker agenda and simultaneously shattering employees’ sense of connectedness with the City.

### **7.1.2 We have betrayed ourselves: an unrealised dream for democracy**

Recently, there has been much public rhetoric about South Africa abandoning its democratic ideals. The open letter that legendary ANC stalwart, Ahmed Kathrada, penned to President Zuma in April 2016 is a case in point, and is part of an immense surge in public discourse about the sacrificing of the ideals of liberation in the ‘new’ South Africa. Kathrada (2016) urged the president to step down and honour the ideals of the liberation movement in South Africa:

And bluntly, if not arrogantly; in the face of such persistently widespread criticism, condemnation and demand, is it asking too much to express the hope that you will choose the correct way that is gaining momentum, to consider stepping down? If not, Comrade President, are you aware that your outstanding contribution to the liberation struggle stands to be severely tarnished if the remainder of your term as President continues to be dogged by crises and a growing public loss of confidence in the ANC and government as a whole. I know that if I were in the President’s shoes, I would step down with immediate effect. I believe that is what would help the country to find its way out of a path that it never imagined it would be on, but one that it must move out of soon.

(<http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/ahmed-kathrada-asks-zuma-to-resign-read-it-in-full-20160402>)

This piece of writing was followed in later months by more fierce and vitriolic diatribes by members of the ANC stalwart community, who have expressed shock, disdain and deep sadness at the palpable erosion of democratic principles in South Africa. In August 2016, Sipho Pitanya (2016), another long-standing ANC member, made the following radical statements

about the President and the governing party at the funeral of Reverend Makhenkesi Stofile, South Africa's former Sports Minister:

We are an ANC that can rightly claim that we are champions of human rights and not because it's a western concept. We were amongst the first to adopt the African and people's rights, no one asked us to, that's why you have a bill of rights in the Constitution. But it must be a great shame that under our own government, we kill in cold blood with horrific brutality, workers for going on strike. We say we are against corruption yet at every turn we are falling over each other trying to steal from the poor. When you drove here you drove past the village of Ngqele. When Rev Stofile was in office he did not give it special treatment. He did not build a palace worth over R200 million amidst a sea of poverty. Accountability is an important measure of the respect you have for the people and for public office. You don't when you're called to account, plunge Parliament into chaos. When the Constitutional Court makes a finding that you broke your oath of office, it means you're honourable no longer, it means you are untrustworthy.

(<http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/text-sipho-pityana-speech-at-stofile-funeral-20160826>)

What is indeed clear in the content offered above is that South Africa is on an emotional precipice currently, one where the ideals of its liberation struggle is a central protagonist in the narrative that is unfolding. These very sentiments came to the fore in the conversation with John, the 52 year old White male in Support Services, who previously featured in Section 6.2.1.1 ('The deafening silence of absent leaders: the leadership void in the City') and Section 6.2.1.7 ('A log around our necks: the inherent contradiction of a World Class African City'). Peter, the 59 year old African male from Support Services who contributed to Section 6.2.1.1 ('The deafening

silence of absent leaders: the leadership void in the City’) and Section 6.2.1.3 (‘Pointers always blaming others: the City’s lack of team cohesion and peer support’) also provided some perspicuity regarding these views.

**Simi:**           **In light of the journey you have been through in the City, how does this make you feel?**

**John:**           I never came here just to do a job, I came here with a mission. I have a personal ethic and a mission. And my mission is that I want to see a transformed and organised South Africa. That’s what I want to see. A normalised, transformed organisational workforce, a normalised, transformed service, I want to see a high-performing organisation that cares for and looks after its communities and its people. That’s what our purpose is, that’s what we are here for. We are here to serve our communities, you know what I’m saying? So it’s difficult for me to answer that question because in some ways, obviously, there has been fundamental transformation, you can’t pretend that this is still the Joburg of 1992 or 1990 or the 80’s or whatever. You can’t pretend it’s still like that because there has been change. But I just believe that it hasn’t always been the best change, it hasn’t always been done the right way. It’s not always the ‘what’, it’s the ‘how’. It has been problematic. I’m just of the opinion that at the moment we are in a pretty bad place in some ways and I don’t think people realise it. I’m of the opinion that we have become morally, ethically and intellectually bankrupt. I really believe that. What has happened is that any semblance of ethical decision-making, principled, moral, leadership has gone. IT’S GONE! (Becomes angry and flustered). And I’m talking now about doing the RIGHT things for the RIGHT reasons. It has become like a free-for-all. (Lengthy pause). And it’s very difficult. You are asking me what I think, it has become very difficult. (Emphatic, his voice quivers). I have always had a mantra of my own where I have always said that ‘this organisation does not determine who I am, I have my own ethic, I have my own morals and I determine who I am and how I conduct myself’ and this organisation will never make me what it is’. And all these years I have been pushing the envelope, pushing

the envelope, pushing the envelope (.), it hasn't gained me friends. I can tell you in some quarters I'm considered to be the devil reincarnated. I suppose, right from the start, even though I am White, I didn't want to be categorised. I refused to be party to any form of racism or categorisation. So this led to problems as well in the service, and they tried to discipline me on MANY occasions. And I refused and I overcame them, and what I proceeded to do is try and change the service. (Lengthy pause). So (.), you understand why I'm getting emotional? (Becomes tearful) ... and what has made it even worse for me is that I feel that we have betrayed ourselves.

**(Extract 24)**

The intensity of John's emotions was quite staggering. Having possessed the ardent desire and personal "*mission*" to effect change and transformation in the South African public service in order to serve its people has certainly taken an emotional toll on John. Inasmuch as change has been effected in the City of Johannesburg, it is clear that he had higher hopes for *how* that change should have been effected. He was distressed when he stated the following, "*I'm of the opinion that we have become morally, ethically and intellectually bankrupt. I really believe that. What has happened is that any semblance of ethical decision-making, principled, moral, leadership has gone. IT'S GONE!*"

It is fascinating that the challenges that he experienced in the apartheid regime, when he was agitating for change, and "*pushing the envelope, pushing the envelope*" still manifests itself today. John possessed a 'personal mantra' that served as a compass for his actions, which was quite profound, "*...this organisation does not determine who I am, I have my own ethic, I have my own morals and I determine who I am and how I conduct myself and this organisation will never make me what it is.*" His attempts at change made him unpopular amongst the leaders of the previous regime – he was viewed as "*...the devil reincarnated*" by some, and faced negative



consequences and threats of punishment. These are the consequences that he faced for finding his ‘voice’ in the system. These are probably the consequences that have silenced the participants in the previous section, 7.1.1 (‘Living in a bubble: feelings of being silenced’). It is ironic that his mantra remained the same in the new regime. Today, it appears that he is still fighting for a shift from corruption and self-interest, the “*free-for-all*” syndrome that seems to plague the public service in South Africa.

Hence, when John asked me whether I understood why he was becoming emotional, I certainly did. I felt his earnest desire to do the ‘right thing’, and it left me wistful for a better future for him at the City, one where his personal mantra could change and would not signify his opposition to the system, but his congruence and oneness with it, his *identification* with it. A shiver ran up my spine when John said “*I feel that we have betrayed ourselves.*” It was so incredibly cogent and apt, giving further impetus to the national discourse referred to earlier.

It is clear how the voices of the ‘I’; ‘We’ (government) and broader socio-cultural context are in dialogue and debate with each other. In stating that “*We have betrayed ourselves*” what John was actually communicating was that he as a person felt betrayed. The cause or mission of which he was a part essentially betrayed his ideals and betrayed him personally. Feelings of betrayal naturally elicit a myriad of feelings – sadness, disappointment, emptiness, hurt, bitterness, melancholy and defensiveness. All of these feelings surfaced in my engagement with John, which will stay with me forever due to the deep impact that it had on me. Yet, ironically, in being part of government, John was also the ‘betrayed’. It is a telling dialogical contradiction as feelings of being a ‘betrayed’ would obviously elicit feelings of agonising guilt and shame. These were indeed some of the painful feelings that surfaced in the next conversation, which was held with Peter.

There were clear similarities in the content that both John and Peter provided, one White, the other African, in similar age groups, with a similar personal ethic. Both were grappling with questions of freedom. Peter's question "*what is freedom?*" spoke to this deep resentment of the current status quo in the country. The conflict between the "I", 'We' and the socio-cultural milieu again surfaces here, as he too had been betrayed as a person and as a member of a previously oppressed community due to the widespread perceptions that government betrayed its democratic ideals.

The process of 'remembering' also has particular Bhaktinian significance in these extracts, for when people 'remember' in life, and:

...when they make 'memory-claims' – they are rarely, if ever, simply describing or reporting an internal process or mental state: they are engaging in the rhetorical, and often contentious, activity of social life, and telling of, or expressing, something of their own position in the current scheme of things in relation to the others around them. (Shotter & Billig, 2008, p.16)

This came to the fore in the conversation with Peter shown below.

**Simi:**                    **How would you describe things here then?**

Peter:                    Simi, you know what (.) the 1994 issue is still here – "what is freedom?" We are free, but freedom has not been implemented the way it should be. We move to new things all the time and there is no continuity. Every small change can make a difference. We expected things to happen, but no one is prepared to make even these small changes. We have all waited patiently FOR WHAT? (Looks deeply upset)

**Simi:**                    **I can see this upsets you.**

Peter:                    (Quietly) We waited patiently. For what? (Lengthy silence)

**(Extract 25)**

Peter's disappointment at having waited patiently for change and 'freedom' also carried a great deal of melancholy in this engagement. His quiet, reflective, rhetorical question, "*We waited patiently. For what?*" carried an immense heaviness and sadness. The room was almost eerily quiet when he said this, and it seemed as if he was really reflecting on so much of his life history as he stared vacantly into the distance for a long period of time. I was at a loss as to what to say to him, I was so moved by his pain. I reflected on my own life after this engagement.

I was born in 1977, and my parents were both active in the political struggle. I remember journalists and activists visiting our home in the 1980s, I remember lengthy conversations about the political situation in the country. I recall anxiety and fear too, but mostly hope for a future where we would all be equal. I remember the 'feeling' of these times most vividly – one of purpose, a mission, a fight for what is right – these were manifested in music and freedom songs too. I reflected that Peter is a few years younger than my own father. When I was born, Peter was a young man fighting for what is right, and in his own way, toiling for a better life for all in this country. Hence, when Peter and I spoke, our lives merged. It was the 'fusion of horizons', that 'historical consciousness' that was referenced in Section 5.1.3 when the interpretive, phenomenological insights were broached. I processed recent conversations with my own father, and they resonated strongly with the feelings that Peter expressed – the devastating feelings of 'having betrayed ourselves.'

### **7.1.3 The job follows you: feelings of being judged by social circles**

The question of 'overlapping memberships' has already been raised a few times in previous sections. In Sections 6.2.1.1 ('The deafening silence of absent leaders: the leadership void in the City'); 6.2.1.4 ('Voters vote for mafias: corruption and self-interest reigns supreme'); 6.2.1.5 ('The nemesis of the billing crisis') and 6.3.2 ('Competing with perceptions: good news

is obliterated'), it was evident that employees of the City navigate a complex relationship with the organisation given that they occupy the dual roles of both employees *and* citizens of the City. It has become obvious that a tension exists between this inside-outside dynamic. Moreover, the participants experienced a gamut of negative emotions stemming from this, including helplessness, fatigue, anger, despair, anxiety, stress, cynicism and resentment.

This section provides a closer look at this idea of overlapping memberships. The following three extracts facilitate a clearer understanding of this. They were sourced from Mila, the 46 year old White female in a citizen-facing role whose previous input featured in Section 6.2.1.2 ('Being sent from pillar to post: massive fragmentation in the City leads to a lack of accountability'); Emma, the 57 year old White female in a citizen-facing role who contributed to Section 6.2.1.7 ('A log around our necks: the inherent contradiction of a World Class African City'); and Tessa, the 48 year old White female from Support Services, who featured in Section 6.2.1.1 ('The deafening silence of absent leaders; the leadership void in the City') and Section 6.2.1.6 ('At the mercy of politicians: political interference in the running of departments').

Mila provided an anecdote about her visit to a car dealership when she purchased her car, and how the owner unexpectedly thrust a billing query upon her.

**Simi:** Can you clarify how your work creates this pressure that you speak of?

Mila: Yes, it creates a lot of pressure. A lot. You know what, I'll give you an example, and I hope this will make sense to you. We bought a car in Hyde Park, and then the owner asked me 'Where do you work?' I said the City of Johannesburg. He said 'Oh, I've got a query. You guys messed up my bill, and no one is prepared to assist me'. It really put me on the backfoot. I was polite and said I would forward his details on to the right people, but I don't even know if they are the people I should be dealing with. So, suddenly, I have this responsibility and I don't have any certainty that the issue will be resolved. AND THEN HE REFERS HIS CLIENTS TO ME AS WELL SO I CAN SORT OUT

THEIR BILLING QUERIES! Wherever you go, they say ‘I’ve got a query’. You know, you try to help, but it’s very frustrating for me. How does the customer feel, you know, if it’s frustrating for ME?

**Simi:** **I can understand that. Does this mean it is difficult to separate your ‘work time’ from ‘private time’?**

**Mila:** Absolutely. It’s very difficult to get away from work and the negative perceptions and issues that people have with the City. You can’t run away from them (giggles). I may be joking about it, but it does get to be a bit too much for me. You know what Simi, we had an Assistant Director in the City and she received a water bill of ‘R1.5 million’. It took her two years to resolve the matter. *AND SHE’S WORKING HERE!* So I can just imagine the frustration that the customers have.

**(Extract 26)**

Mila really felt like she was put “...on the backfoot” by this query and she was quite pressurised by this. Although she was polite to the car dealer and indicated that she would channel the query to the relevant department, she was wracked by the uncertainty regarding whether the query would indeed be resolved. To make matters worse, he referred other customers to her as well, which heightened her frustration and anxiety. The situation that Mila presented links strongly to the theme of fragmentation in the City, which was covered in Section 6.2.1.2 (Being sent from pillar to post: massive fragmentation in the City leads to a lack of accountability’), as she was uncertain about who to approach and whether the query would indeed be resolved. Hence, this weighed quite heavily on her. Furthermore, the situation is also linked to Section 6.2.1.5 (‘The nemesis of the billing crisis’) as it is clear that billing queries still abound in the City, as the participants have suggested. What is pertinent here is a blurring of boundaries between Mila’s work life and private life, one that is clearly unwelcome, but certainly an outcome of the overlapping membership that the City’s employees experience – an

‘occupational hazard’ of sorts, especially given that service delivery issues have been top of mind for the general public in South Africa for some time now. The encounter at the car dealership seemed to have left her feeling quite harassed.

Mila empathised with the plight of the customer when she said *“How does the customer feel, you know, if it’s frustrating for ME?”* She also recalled an incident where one of her colleagues at the City struggled for two years to resolve her own incorrect water bill of R1.5. Million. Hence, the City’s poor service extends to its very own employees, who by virtue of their overlapping membership, are also citizens. This creates a quandary due to negative perceptions of government in our country, and this overlapping membership is experienced sensitively due to the constant negative scrutiny and attention. It is a difficult situation to ‘escape’ from, aptly put by Mila in stating, *“It’s very difficult to get away from work and the negative perceptions and issues that people have with the City. You can’t run away from them.”* Had the converse been true, perhaps the overlapping membership would have been experienced with a great deal of pride and satisfaction by employees of the City.

The harassment that Mila was exposed to is echoed by Emma, who felt that she was *“interrogated”* in her social circles.

**Simi:**                **So you are saying that people ask you about your job when you are out socially?**

Emma:                Yes! Where I work will always come up. Even when I go to a braai or want to relax, I get asked these questions. Like an INTERROGATION man! I try and explain to them how the City works. We have various departments, *ja, ag*, you know, I normally try my best with them. But in a very simple way. But you know (.) sometimes they rub me up the wrong way, AND THEN I REALLY GET MY NAILS OUT! Especially when they sort of speak to you like you don’t have a brain you know, you know you work for the Council [the City], so you don’t have a brain (sarcastic). Look, I help them very much, I say ‘Listen, we have got extremely qualified people here. It’s just that we do have the

scenario where we do have token appointments, it's out there.' But you know Simi, it's hard work to manage these things in your social networks. It makes me tired and fed-up.

**(Extract 27)**

Again, as in Mila's case, boundaries were blurred between Emma's work-time and leisure-time as there was no real 'time-out' from the questions that people had about the City. While she suggested that she tried to respond appropriately to the questions and concerns people had, at times, she too felt quite harassed and insulted, which results in defensive behaviour on her part – *"But you know (.) sometimes they rub me up the wrong way, AND THEN I REALLY GET MY NAILS OUT! Especially when they sort of speak to you like you don't have a brain you know, you work for the Council [the City], so you don't have a brain."*

In these situations, a dialogical strain is evident as Emma fought to elevate her 'self' above others in the organisation who were perceived as lacking intellect. In order to preserve her 'self', and integrity, she became aggressive and actively resisted this perception that threatened her sense of self. Emma felt like she was treading thorny terrain, and her comments attest to the discomfort that she was exposed to in her social networks due to the organisation she belongs to. This discomfort was revealed when she said, *"But you know Simi, it's hard work to manage these things in your social networks. It makes me tired and fed-up."* As humans, we find meaning in our social connections, and in these instances, Emma battled to affirm herself within these social networks. The perception that employees of the City lack intellect is clearly insulting and patronising to Emma, and she acknowledged that she lost her patience at times.

It was also evident that Emma had to explain the situation of *"token appointments"* in the City, while simultaneously pledging her allegiance to the numerous highly qualified staff that the City employs. Tokenism seems like an oversimplified explanation for very complex, interrelated

issues at the City, as unpacked in the precious chapter. The term “*token appointments*” is also a highly loaded one, for it could be a ‘code’ term for black appointments. From a Bhaktinian point of view, this also attests to the notion of ‘utterance,’ which was covered in Section 4.3 on the dialogical self. In speaking the words “*token appointments*”, the “individual, social and ideological” (Shotter & Billig, 1998, p. 14) emerged clearly in a chain-like and continuous manner, revealing its socially embedded nature (Beech, 2008; Shotter, 1992; Shotter & Billig, 1998). Hence, Emma’s utterance is not innocuous as it could be referencing prevailing racist attitudes in the organisation, and Emma’s own belief system about what transformation in the organisation means, and feels like. She actively distinguished herself from “*token appointments*.” In a chain-like way, strings of utterances such as these become the prevailing organisational discourse, and are socially and historically contingent. As stated by Hermans (2001), “Every utterance has a history in preceding dialogues and an embeddedness in situation and culture” (p. 264).

Tessa, in the next extract, felt extremely disempowered by a social encounter that she had experienced. She was at a social event and one of the guests spoke in a very disparaging manner about the City and the poor service he had received.

**Simi:**                **You are saying that there are many negative perceptions out there?**

Tessa:                You know, the perception is out there that employees in the public sector are not competent. ‘They are lazy. They are not contributing to the community’. I was involved in a situation one day, it was at a social event and this guy said he has got (sic) problems with his service account. And you know, I could hear how he was talking about Jorissen Place and the people working in that building (looks nervous, and aggravated). I really felt ashamed in that situation. And I really didn’t want to stand up and say ‘I’m actually part of this organisation. How can I assist you?’ Because everyone was just chirping in and just complaining and moaning (.) it was really a deconstructive session. And *ja*, I



think the whole LABELING of the City as well as its employees was a bit tough. And to think 'I am part of this.'

**Simi:** **How did that make you feel?**

Tessa: You know, it made me feel vulnerable. It made me feel (.) you know, for that moment, I took on that cloud of it being personal. I felt ashamed, you know, that people are talking about my colleagues in that manner. I thought 'Should I stand up, mention that I am part of this?' Or will people perceive me in a different light? Because I think people there had high regard for me. But in terms of this incident, I think that would have changed their perceptions, so I didn't say anything.

**(Extract 28)**

The experience made Tessa feel ashamed, *"I really felt ashamed in that situation. And I really didn't want to stand up and say 'I'm actually part of this organisation. How can I assist you?'"* Her feelings of shame and judgment prevented her from speaking up. Furthermore, the *"labeling"* of employees of the City that occurred during that encounter seemed to have been a blow to her self-esteem, and she felt vulnerable and disempowered. She felt that prior to this encounter, the people in this social circle seemed to have held her in *"high regard"* but she was concerned that if she ventured to mention her affiliation with the City, then that would compromise her standing with them, and they would consequently perceive her *"...in a different light."* It is evident that Tessa's 'self' went into 'hiding' in order to protect itself. It retreated into the background in this social engagement in her quest to preserve her dignity and self-esteem. As such, she allowed her social identity and how she was perceived by the group – as someone held in *"high regard"* – to move into the foreground. The dialogical, "extended self" (Hermans, 2001, p. 245) is in clear view here, namely, the fluidity of a self that does not reside *within* a person, instead, it is an *encompassing* and distributed self. There are permeable boundaries between self and other, and each emerges or recedes given specific contextual factors.

The issue of self-esteem is a telling one in this section. The overlapping membership (being an employee *and* a citizen) is problematic. Due to negative perceptions from those outside the City (i.e. a negative organisational reputation), this results in feelings of being under great scrutiny in social gatherings and during personal and leisure time. The labeling and negative attention has obviously resulted in feelings of shame and a compromised self-esteem. This observed phenomenon ties in strongly with the literature on perceived organisational reputation. Employees use their organisational affiliation to boost their self-esteem, and should their organisation have a poor reputation, this will result in discomfort, embarrassment and a knock to their self-esteem, therefore compromising organisational identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Helm, 2013; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This certainly seemed to be the case for Mila, Emma and Tessa.

#### **7.1.3.1 ‘I am the community’: employees traverse the delicate boundary between serving the community and being the community**

Navigating the boundary between ‘serving’ the community and ‘being’ the community caused conflict and some inner turmoil for the participants. This was indicative in the extracts of Bheki, the 40 year old African male from Support Services whose other narratives featured in Section 6.2.1.4 (‘Voters vote for mafias: corruption and self-interest reigns supreme’) and 7.1.1 (‘Living in a bubble: feelings of being silenced’); John, the 52 year old White male from Support Services who already contributed to three other narratives in Section 6.2.1.1 (‘The deafening silence of absent leaders: the leadership void in the City’), 6.2.1.7 (‘A log around our necks: the inherent contradiction of a ‘World Class African City’”), and 7.1.2 (‘We have betrayed ourselves: an unrealized dream for democracy’); and Busi, the 56 year old African female in a

citizen-facing role who featured in Section 6.2.1.2 ('Being sent from pillar to post: massive fragmentation in the City leads to a lack of accountability').

What was apparent in these conversations is that none of these participants had ever led cloistered, sheltered lives free from the grim realities that life under apartheid South Africa brought with it, they were always deeply in touch with what those realities meant. The fact that people today still live under enormous poverty, strain, and a lack of equality is in many respects their own reality, for they are so enmeshed within the plight of the communities that they serve.

Bheki's extract follows, and he positioned this powerfully when he said, "*You know Simi (.) I can't cast a blind eye when it comes to the people out there, the communities who were promised change. I am that community. I grew up not having it easy, and fighting for survival and waiting for change.*" It is evident that Bheki felt the pain of those destitute in the communities because it was a situation that was so familiar to him. Hence, the fervor with which he expressed his connection to the community was tangible. It spoke to the spirit of *ubuntu* where:

Being a person is a status achieved by virtue of belonging to a community, involves an active participation; it is not conferred as a birthright and you cannot be a person simply by being passive. Thus a person may fail to achieve personhood according to this African conception. (Menkiti, 1984, p.174)

**Simi:**                    **What exactly is this mindset change that you refer to?**

Bheki:                    You know that mentality where we all chase our own needs? Where we all chase ways to fill our own pockets even if SOMEONE ELSE GOES HUNGRY BECAUSE OF IT! (Scowls and clicks his tongue, shows disgust). That needs to change. That change in mindset needs to happen – somehow and somewhere.

**Simi:**        **Tell me more.**

Bheki:        You know Simi (.) I can't cast a blind eye when it comes to the people out there, the communities who were promised change. I am that community. I grew up not having it easy, and fighting for survival and waiting for change. Sometimes the way things happen now, it's truly shocking. Even now, with all the changes that we tried to push over the last two decades. We as South Africans, we are somehow living like Europeans. We are living like we are somewhere else, we are not taking care of each other. We are living separately. We are a developing country. There needs to be an urgency to change this mindset.

**(Extract 29)**

Hence, Bheki found the situation untenable and “*shocking*”. What appears to be especially disconcerting to him was the ‘separateness’ in the way in which South Africans live. What struck me as Bheki shared his thoughts was that he drew parallels between the City’s ‘lack of community’ and the very communities it served, and how the interdependencies and human relationships between fellow South Africans seemed to have eroded significantly, even though democracy had dawned. His statement, “*Even now, with all the changes that we tried to push over the last two decades. We as South Africans, we are somehow living like Europeans. We are living like we are somewhere else, we are not taking care of each other. We are living separately*” is poignant. It speaks to *ubuntu* and demonstrates the nurturing of human connections that he believed needed to be urgently attended to.

In a follow-up conversation with Bheki, I enquired about whether he was, in fact, referring to *ubuntu* in that instance and he indicated that he certainly was. South Africans “*...living like Europeans,*” is for Bheki absolutely contrary to the principles of *ubuntu*. The African conception of the self cannot be conceived of as in the Western point of view, in terms of abstract physical or psychological characteristics, or as a solitary character. In the African

conception of self, “The reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of individual life histories” (Menkiti, 1984, p. 174), and the community therefore defines the person as a person (Gumbo, 2014). According to Menkiti (1984), “A person is not some isolated static quality or rationality, will, or memory: the notion of an individual who is not shaped by the community but is seen as an abstract dangling personality does not make sense in African cultures” (p. 171). Hence, when Bheki said, “*I am that community*,” this had special resonance with *ubuntu* as it speaks to a system of “communalism and interdependence” (Idoniboye-Obu & Whetho, 2013; p. 233).

It is apparent that Bheki endorsed this kind of communal spirit that means that humans can only be effective through other humans. It is a potent conviction to weave into his narrative because it meant that he was going back to his very roots in order to find a shield that could protect South Africa from itself – the rampant greed, individualistic ways of thinking and ‘separateness’ that runs contrary to *ubuntu* and “...the spirit of unconditional African collective contribution, solidarity, acceptance, dignity, stewardship, compassion and care, hospitality and legitimacy” (Mbigi, 1997, as cited in Karsten & Illa, 2005, p. 612).

The following statement Bheki made captured this, “*You know that mentality where we all chase our own needs? Where we all chase ways to fill our own pockets even if SOMEONE ELSE GOES HUNGRY BECAUSE OF IT! (Scowls and clicks his tongue, shows disgust). That needs to change. That change in mindset needs to happen – somehow and somewhere*”. *Ubuntu* also hinges on the ability to perform moral duties as a member of a community, and unless this level of moral maturity is achieved, then personhood will not be achieved (Menkiti, 1984). What became clearer to me after this discussion was that Bheki expressed that the City’s problems

were, in fact, a microcosm of South Africa's pervasive problems, as it transitions through the 'moral junctures' necessary for it to create a strong and unified identity.

John initially took a cerebral and logical, yet still emotional, stance on the matter of community when we approached this theme. He explained the dynamism that existed between the City and the community it served, but also with the businesses and other institutions it interfaced with. He stated that, "*The City cannot be above them.*"

**Simi: What does the role of the community entail?**

John: They have SUCH a fundamental role. At the end of the day the City does not operate on an island. At the end of the day the City is a dynamic organism that has interfaces on multiple levels – with communities, societies, institutions, businesses, you name it. The City cannot be above them. You can't say I have a political mandate, and I am the government and I will determine your fate, your future and everything else. No. Yet it seems like this is happening in this place. If you talk about a true democracy and a truly socially engaged local government, then there has to be a joint responsibility between the City and the community. Because the very people you are serving are your electorate as well. And ultimately you are spending the electorate's money. Maybe greed, and selfishness and a lack of morals has eroded this thinking, or LOGIC! We fought for change, but this change hasn't TRULY occurred. I hated seeing what I saw then, and I hate seeing what is happening now. I don't know, but we are so terribly out of synch with what needs to happen. I mean Simi, THINK ABOUT IT, I am here on the inside, and you are on the outside. But we are both members of the community. I AM the City. And so are YOU.

**Simi: Let me test my understanding of what you have just said. You are an employee of the City, but also part of the community that the City serves?**

John: Exactly! It's difficult to manage the boundary sometimes. I mean it boils down to the fact that MY COLLEAGUES ARE STEALING FROM ME AND MY FAMILY! (Has an incredulous look on his face).

**(Extract 30)**

John implied that the City was, in fact, neglecting its responsibilities to *serve*, and needed to cultivate the understanding that it cannot act in a superior manner to citizens. He was even clearer on this line of thinking when he said that, *“You can’t say I have a political mandate, and I am the government and I will determine your fate, your future and everything else. No. Yet it seems like this is happening in this place. If you talk about a true democracy and a truly socially engaged local government, then there has to be a joint responsibility between the City and the community. Because the very people you are serving are your electorate as well, and ultimately you are spending the electorate’s money.”*

John emphasised the idea of a *“joint responsibility”* between the City and the community, but felt that this understanding and intent had been obfuscated by the avarice that had seized local government – this is captured by his statement, *“Maybe greed, and selfishness and a lack of morals has eroded this thinking, or LOGIC!”* The fact that John had been very connected to the changes that citizens were agitating for in apartheid South Africa, and was highly involved in the struggle for freedom and what it meant, also came through in this conversation when he said, *“I hated seeing what I saw then, and I hate seeing what is happening now.”* For John, the deep-rooted selfishness that gripped apartheid South Africa was still prevalent at the time of this study – it seems that government is still very much out of touch with the needs of its people, as it pursues self-serving agendas. Furthermore, he established the ‘continuity of the self’ through time and space in making this particular statement. John felt that the City was disconnected from its purpose – *“I don’t know, but we are so terribly out of sync with what needs to happen.”*

These perceptions tie in strongly with Bheki’s in the extract above, as John’s words “out of sync” and Bheki’s words “living separately” resonate with each other as they speak to a lack

of community integration as South Africans, and as local government, which as an entity is also comprised of citizens of South Africa who need to have a unified purpose and a sense of community, and who need to live the principles of *ubuntu*. They believed that seeking the ‘greater good’ seemed to have fallen by the wayside.

John positioned the reciprocity of reputation quite overtly when he stated, “*I mean Simi, THINK ABOUT IT, I am here on the inside, and you are on the outside. But we are both members of the community. I AM the City. And so are YOU.*” I was amazed by the lucidity of this statement, for it revealed the complex dynamism that underpins our relationship as citizens with the government, and the inside-outside dynamic that characterises perceived organisational reputation. Reputation, as a co-created construct, was palpable in this encounter. Furthermore, the matter of overlapping memberships came to the fore as well. As mentioned in Section 7.1.3 (‘The job follows you: feelings of being judged by social circles’), being caught up in this tension of being ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the organisation must certainly create discomfort for employees of government institutions, and it must feel like a continuous, conflictual situation. In keeping with the theory of the dialogical self, John rejected the idea of abstract, individualised selves in favour of the position of the self that is permeated by, and also permeates its social milieu.

When I raised this delicate boundary with John, and asked him whether he concurred with the idea that he was an employee of the City and concurrently a citizen that the City serves, he responded, “*Exactly! It’s difficult to manage the boundary sometimes. I mean it boils down to the fact that MY COLLEAGUES ARE STEALING FROM ME AND MY FAMILY! (Has an incredulous look on his face).*” Until this conversation, it did not seem that John had reflected on what this boundary actually implied. He may have been subconsciously aware of this dynamic



and the negative implications for him as a citizen of Johannesburg, but until he had articulated this in the conversation with me, it appeared that this understanding had not manifested itself with such exactitude. He seemed shocked by his own revelation. In ‘realising’ that his own employer was “*stealing*” from him, it was almost like a façade had dropped, and a gritty reality had surfaced.

In the third and final extract in this section, Busi spoke of the boundary that she needed to navigate in an anecdote that she relayed about service delivery conflict in her community. The members of her very community were prepared to *toyi-toyi*, and she knew that this was a fragile situation as it could easily escalate into mob violence, given the anger of the community members. Her statement, “*Sometimes you find that before you are an employee you are a community person,*” was powerful and drew my attention to the dialogical negotiations that she often needed to perform in her role as an employee of the City and as a citizen and member of the community.

**Simi:** Can you tell me about a time when you felt the reputation of the City was at stake?

**Busi:** Hmmm, where do I start? I know of an incident where I for one, I felt bad about it. Sometimes you find that before you are an employee, you are a community person. However, because it’s a political area, sometimes you refrain from shouting out, ‘Hey, stop what you are doing! Often you will find communities fighting politicians, and one of the main reasons for this is the lack of information. And you need to protect this councilor, you need to protect the government and yourself as you are also exposed to risks. There was a problem with a lack of service delivery in my community. The community was saying ‘Let’s go and toyi-toyi around this particular councilor. I had to choose whether to become a protector or community member. Obviously, in my line of work, ethically, I can’t lead such a march. I had to find a way to calm the situation. I was very fortunate in that I spoke to a few people and they listened. I said, “Is this the right way to do things? How are you going to feel if I am also attacked? Let’s review the strategy.” So they

listened to me. And I am happy to say that he was never attacked. And the poor soul doesn't even know that I assisted, or that I averted the problem.

**Simi:** Did you feel conflicted at the time?

**Busi:** I was conflicted in the sense that the complaint was legit, it was really legit, but even so, we in the community could not address the situation with violence and intimidation. IT WAS A CONFLICT FOR ME AS I WAS ALSO AWARE THAT THIS PARTICULAR GUY WAS NOT DOING THE RIGHT THING! So where do you cross the line? But because humanity comes forth, we have to do what is right, I was glad afterwards. I went to the particular person afterwards, I said "Hey Guy, this is the situation, these are some of the issues. Can you please try and resolve them, if you don't want to get into trouble for being negligent".

**Simi:** So you were quite transparent with him?

**Busi:** YES, HE KNOWS! BECAUSE I WENT THERE AS A COMMUNITY PERSON. I TOLD HIM THAT THIS IS A DISFAVOUR TO ME AS A COMMUNITY MEMBER AND I AM NOT ALONE!

**(Extract 31)**

In these dialogical negotiations, Busi had to actively choose whether to perform her role or to support the community – *"The community was saying 'Let's go and toyi-toyi around this particular councilor. I had to choose whether to become a protector or community member. Obviously in my line of work, ethically, I can't lead such a march. I had to find a way to calm the situation.'"* However, her ethical principles prevailed and she was able to defuse the situation and initiate some dialogue about the right way to approach the problem. What engrossed me in this conversation was the loaded nature of the negotiation between *"protector"* and *"community member."* It was easy to understand that while her integrity manifested itself in the situation, the negotiation was fraught with complexity – what does a 'protector' of the City entail in light of all the organisational ills the City is grappling with? It certainly could not have been a clinical and uncomplicated decision to contemplate. There were competing selves at play for Busi during this

situation, her dialogical selves were actively competing with each other because as a City employee she was potentially perpetuating a safer outcome, but a lack of justice would then prevail, however, as a community member, violence could have been an outcome, but for a seemingly just cause – better, more equitable service delivery.

She relayed the following, which contributes to this idea of a knotty process of negotiation, *“IT WAS A CONFLICT FOR ME AS I WAS ALSO AWARE THAT THIS PARTICULAR GUY WAS NOT DOING THE RIGHT THING! So where do you cross the line? But because humanity comes forth we have to do it right, I was glad afterwards.”* In her choice of assuming the role identity of *“protector,”* she felt that she successfully averted a potentially volatile situation. However, she once again oscillated to the role identity of *“community member”* when I enquired about whether she had been transparent with the Councilor in question about his dubious actions that could have potentially ignited conflict in their community, she replied, *“YES, HE KNOWS! BECAUSE I WENT THERE AS A COMMUNITY PERSON. I TOLD HIM THAT THIS IS A DISFAVOUR TO ME AS A COMMUNITY MEMBER AND I AM NOT ALONE!”*

It is very apparent that overlapping memberships feature distinctively in the negotiations that employees of the City may need to perform with themselves in the situations that they encounter, by virtue of their enmeshment in the fate of the very communities that they are a part of *and* serve. We are also once again reminded of the appropriateness of the dialogical conception of the self, and how pertinent the multi-voiced self is to perceived organisational reputation. As referenced earlier, and as stated by Hermans, 2001, “Contrasts, oppositions and negotiations are part of a distributed, multi-voiced self” (p. 245). We are also reminded that, “The self is not an entity that can be described in terms of internal positions only, as if they are monological traits, but should be described in the context of other positions...” (Hermans, 2001,

p. 253), and positions are not considered "...as isolated from one another. Instead, the individual is involved in an active process of positioning in which cooperations and competitions between positions develop in a particular situation" (p. 253).

It was also noticeable that underpinning the narrative of overlapping memberships was their traversing of the boundary between serving the community and 'being the community'. Bheki, John and Busi all felt profoundly connected to their communities, each with their own, unique relationship in this regard, yet all aspiring for the greater good that the prospects of a democratic South Africa offered, and that local government was supposedly intent on delivering.

#### **7.1.4 I am not like them: the coexistence of pride and shame**

While Section 7.1.3 ('The job follows you: feelings of being judged by social circles') explored the impact of feelings of shame on participants, this is not a cut-and-dried affair. This is because there is a complex intermingling of pride and shame that characterises participants' experiences of the City. A sense of pride is facilitated by the participants feeling like they contribute in their small way to society by virtue of their personal mission and purpose in the organisation – however, the 'shadow' side of this, which elicits shame and guilt, is that they are concurrently tied to the negative actions of the City. Pride also emerges from the relationships and personal connections that the participants had built with others in the organisation, as well as the effort that they had invested in building their careers in the City. This section utilises three extracts to demonstrate this, the first from Hoosen, the 45 year old Indian male from Support Services, whose ideas were captured in Section 6.3.1 ('A perpetuating cycle: history repeats itself'); Ronelle, the 45 year old White female from Support Services who featured in Section 6.2.1.3 ('Pointers always blaming others: the City's lack of team cohesion and peer support') and Section 6.2.1.5 ('The nemesis of the billing crisis'); and Zarina, the 57 year old Indian female

from Support Services who appeared in Section 6.2.1.4 (‘Voters vote for mafias: corruption and self-interest reigns supreme’).

Hoosen conveyed that he felt a sense of guilt at the City’s non-delivery, as “*No matter how you try to explain yourself out of it, you are a part of this bureaucracy.*”

**Simi:**                **In terms of the cycle of non-delivery that you speak of, how does this make you feel?**

**Hoosen:**           I feel guilt. Definitely a sense of guilt. You know you are a part of this bureaucracy. No matter how you try to explain yourself out of it, you are a part of this bureaucracy. If you get a payslip at the end of the month, you are a part of the bureaucracy. You are bound to this whole process, so there is a lot of guilt. I try to do things differently within the rules, try to motivate different ways of thinking in my team, I try to get people excited. I try to make them see the bigger picture. And give them the value chain and how important they are in the value chain. So I am trying to do my bit. But it needs to see the light of day. That’s the problem. You know, to penetrate this tough mindset at the City. Like I said, the machinery of the City carries on, and often, not for the good of everyone in the City. It’s impossible to create a boundary between you and the City and say you are above the shenanigans here. I will share something with you. Sometimes when I am about to eat my supper at home, I pause and think about those we serve, and how we are stealing from them (looks pensive). It’s really not a good feeling. So every day, I try to keep my chin up and try harder to make a difference in my small way.

**(Extract 32)**

Hoosen, however also spoke about being “*bound*” to the City, which denotes a level of allegiance and loyalty, which fundamentally also carries much guilt. As he eloquently stated, “*...the machinery of the City carries on and often, not for the good of everyone in the City. It’s impossible to create a boundary between you and the City and say you are above the shenanigans here.*” The factor that causes pride to ‘recede’ and guilt and shame to ‘emerge’ is

therefore related to the fact that he was critical about the City's problems, but still received a 'paycheck' from the City, and was therefore implicated in its issues.

Hoosen tried to mitigate his feelings of guilt by going the extra mile to try and motivate the team that he led by explaining to them how they fit into the value chain of the City, and trying to create meaning and purpose for them. He conceded, however, that it was a "*tough mindset*" to tackle. He was very earnest when he said he would "*share something*" with me, and became very pensive and quiet – he said, "*Sometimes when I am about to eat my supper at home, I pause and think about those we serve, and how we are stealing from them (looks pensive). It's really not a good feeling.*"

This is something quite deep and disturbing to be contemplating during the relaxed context of one's evening supper, it is clearly a matter that weighed heavily on his mind. The word "*stealing*" denotes that belonging to the organisation made him feel like a 'thief', and there was certainly shame attached to this. However, he also stated, "*So every day, I try to keep my chin up and try harder, to make a difference in my small way.*" It was inspiring to hear that level of commitment, he still nurtured his allegiance to the organisation regardless of his feelings of guilt and shame. I reflected that it must take courage and magnanimity of spirit to take this stance.

Ronelle also expressed the negativity and shame that she carried around, and that her sense of pride had been affected because, as she said, "*You get labeled the same way as everyone else does.*"

**Simi:** I can see that all these things that you have described irritate you?

**Ronelle:** (Looks fidgety and stressed). It makes me feel negative. You know, because you are not proud of where you work. You get labeled the same way as everyone else does. Because there are so many people here that (sic) are never willing to assist or you know (.) things

just don't move and there is no delivery and they just don't care. So everybody seems to have an impression that if you work for government or local government you have that (sic) same poor ethics, the same work ethic, you know. It makes me feel ashamed to be looked upon in that way. I AM NOT LIKE THEM, but it's hard for anyone outside to see that. I mean, I am PROUD of where I started in this organisation. It wasn't easy for me, I had a matric and we were battling at home [struggling financially] and I put sweat and tears into making a stable life for us (long silence, reflecting)

**Simi:**            **You carry these negative feelings then? How do you cope?**

Ronelle:        Unfortunately, I do take my frustrations home with me. My family experiences negative emotions from me and I am tired and snappy a lot of the time. The longer it carries on, the more you feel it, and the more they feel it.

**(Extract 33)**

Therefore, the perceived lack of responsiveness and poor work ethic at the City made Ronelle “...*feel ashamed to be looked upon in that way.*” She was fidgety and anxious and her hands fluttered about as she spoke. Ronelle was blatant when she stated, “*I AM NOT LIKE THEM.*” It seemed that she felt the conscious need to distinguish herself from the poor perceptions of the City, and she articulated this firmly. Hence, the shame that underpinned Ronelle's conversation was also punctuated by a steely resolve to express her individuality. These sentiments of shame and determination were juxtaposed with an undeniable sense of pride at having defied the odds to make a career at the City, and therefore establish solid foundations for her family, who had struggled financially. I gained a sense of how challenging this must have been for her when she said, “...*I put sweat and tears into making a stable life for us.*” It is therefore evident that her sense of pride emerged and her sense of shame receded when she reflected on how she had persevered in her career and ‘climbed the ladder’ at the City. The

agitation that she experienced extended into her home life, it is apparent that it was difficult to contain her feelings at home, and she was “...*tired and snappy a lot of the time.*”

As in both extracts above, Zarina was embarrassed by employees of the City who did not have a “*conscience*” as they did not exert the effort needed in their jobs, and therefore in her opinion, were not earning their pay – she indicated that “...*there are those just blasting our reputation away, here for a free ride.*”

**Simi:**                    **How do you react when people express these negative thoughts about the City?**

Zarina:                It makes you feel *lousy* because the thing is, you know you are giving your all, you are working, you know you are paid to work. Like I always tell my colleagues, you must be loyal to your employer, the City of Johannesburg, because at the end of the day you are getting your daily bread from your employer. How do you feel going to the bank at the end of the month when you haven't put anything in? When you haven't worked? You've got to have a conscience you know. So yes, it makes me feel really embarrassed that we have this situation where I put everything I can into an honest day's work, and there are those just blasting our reputation away, here for a free ride. It's difficult to even tell people where you work, you are scared you will be judged. It's an awkward thing you know. But then (lengthy pause), I reflect on my career in the City. I have grown up here, there are things that disappoint you, but then you also think that there are people here that you have known for a long, long time, a lifetime. The City gave me a career and an income and stability. I am proud of that. And you can't let people get to you because the people around you are always going to upset you. So you just stand firm for what you believe in. I say 'Thanks for everything', it's been really good (makes a 'prayer' gesture with her hands).

**(Extract 34)**

Her strong personal values came through when she said, “*Like I always tell my colleagues, you must be loyal to your employer, the City of Johannesburg, because at the end of*



*the day you are getting your daily bread from your employer.”* Her fears of being judged prevented her from openly stating to outsiders where she worked, which indicates a high degree of shame and discomfort. However, as much as this is an “*awkward*” dynamic, after a period of reflection in the conversation, Zarina’s eyes shone as she expressed her gratitude for her employer. In my notes I wrote, “smiling eyes”. Amidst her disappointment at the conduct of her fellow employees at the City, she still possessed a deep sense of appreciation for and pride regarding the long-standing relationships she had sustained at the City and said the following, *“The City gave me a career and an income and stability. I am proud of that.”* Her heartwarming sincerity was so humbling when she stated, *“And you can’t let people get to you because the people around you are always going to upset you. So you just stand firm for what you believe in. I say ‘Thanks for everything’, it’s been really good (makes a ‘prayer’ gesture with her hands).”*

It was evident that when Zarina reminisced about her career, she expressed the continuity of her ‘self’ through a historical consciousness that bound her fate to that of the City’s very deeply. She saw the City as part of her identity, and thus her past, present and future. This is because “...selves are not isolated nuclei of consciousness locked in the head, nor do selves arise rootlessly from the present. On the contrary, selves are distributed interpersonally and take meaning from the historical circumstances that gave shape to cultural values” (Bruner, 1990, as cited in Hermans, 1992, p. 29). I walked away from this conversation with mixed emotions, compassion for the fact that Zarina continued to try so hard amidst the obstacles, but also admiration and respect for her strength of character.

## **7.2 Believe in the destination: finding purpose and meaning**

Regardless of the numerous challenges outlined throughout the course of this research, I was continuously pulled out of a sense of anxiety and despair through this experience with the

City, and by shining examples of participants' resilience and fortitude. Two extracts provide a good feel for the narrative of 'hope', due to participants 'believing in the destination'. The first was from Tessa, the 48 year old White female from support services, who shared her views in three prior extracts in Sections 6.2.1.1 ('The deafening silence of absent leaders: the leadership void in the City'), 6.2.1.6 ('At the mercy of the politicians: political interference in the running of departments'), and 7.1.3 ('The job follows you: feelings of being judged by social circles'); and Vuyo, the 48 year old African male in a citizen-facing role, who featured in Sections 6.2.1.3 ('Pointers always blaming others: the City's lack of team cohesion and peer support'), and 6.3.2 ('Competing with perceptions: good news is obliterated').

Tessa thrived on hope, in fact, she said that in her office, she had a sign saying 'hope'. She expressed a robust sense of purpose and seemed to pursue her goals with zeal. Rather than feeling constrained by the naysayers and demotivated employees at the City, she drew her energy from the "*magic people*" who shared her energy and value system. While it was difficult for her to negate the negativity that exists in the organisation, she chose to remain hopeful and focused on the possibilities. She said, "*WE HAVE MAGIC PEOPLE HERE! People that (sic) share the same values, principles, and with magic people we can transform this environment. And I'm still here because I believe in the possibilities.*"

**Simi:**                    **Given all the concerns you have expressed, what keeps you going?**

Tessa:                    You know what, you'll see in my office I have got a little sign saying 'hope'. I thrive on hope. I believe that I am here for a reason. If I was not meant to be here, I wouldn't be. I think I may have sounded a bit negative before (.) but that is our reality in the organisation. But I still see that we have magic people in the organisation. WE HAVE MAGIC PEOPLE HERE! People that (sic) share the same values, principles, and with magic people we can transform this environment. And I'm still here because I believe in the possibilities, and you know what, sometimes you do get feedback from people. I saw

a person the other day, and I remembered that I contributed to this person's life in some small manner. And that just makes your effort worthwhile, your journey...You feel 'WOW!' There's no money that can compensate for that feeling. There's this one guy, Michael, I trained him years ago on customer care, and he battled, he battled with literacy and numeracy. Every time I saw him he said 'You are my teacher'. And that is like...(becomes overwhelmed and emotional). And he told me recently, he's going on pension in June, and I told him to come and see me before he leaves. You know, you feel like you mean something to someone. That's why we are supposed to be here. But you don't always get that, you know, to be honest. I don't want to always look around at what is happening around me because that suffocates me. I try to focus on other things. What we CAN achieve. I remember someone said to me when I joined, 'You want to do this but let me tell you, you are going to fail'. And I said to the person "You know what, if I give it my best shot, and I can sleep at night, and even if it's not good enough for the organisation but I know I have given it my best shot, for me, that is good enough.' I believe in the destination for South Africa. BELIEVE IN THE DESTINATION! If you don't have hope in your life you will always focus on the miserable things.

**(Extract 35)**

She also spoke of the impact that assisting others had had on her, and how it fuelled her sense of purpose and personal value. A sense of deep pride emerged as she relayed the story of Michael, a colleague who had struggled with numeracy and literacy and she had supported him in his efforts to improve himself in this regard. She became overwhelmed by emotion when she reminisced about how he would always refer to her as "*his teacher*" thereafter. Tessa gained 'currency' and connection to her work from the contribution that she made to the lives of others, which was evident when she said "*I remembered that I contributed to this person's life in some small manner. And that just makes your effort worthwhile.*" Experiences like these have clearly

had a significant impact on her, and she expressed a powerful altruism when she said, “...*you feel like you mean something to someone. That’s why we are supposed to be here.*”

Tessa consciously steered her thinking away from the negative because she felt that the negative pull could be quite debilitating, and it “*suffocates*” her. She also recalled a time when she had commenced her career at the City and a colleague cautioned her that she would fail. However, Tessa continued to “*believe in the destination for South Africa*” and this seems to have provided her with the armour and resilience to persevere in the City. When she spoke, she was animated and excited, and imparted strength and a strong conviction in her beliefs. This was a truly uplifting conversation as it made me reflect on how positivity propagates positivity.

This idea of Tessa’s unconditional hope, and her ability to ‘consciously steer her thinking away from negativity’ is aligned with the academic literature on Positive Organisational Behaviours (POB). As stated by Avey, Wernsing and Luthans (2008), “People who are high in hope possess the uncanny ability to generate multiple pathways to accomplishing their goals”. This really rings true of Tessa’s narrative of hope.

Over the years, empirical evidence has bolstered the notion that positive emotions have a positive impact on organisational behaviours and outcomes (Avey, Luthans & Youssef, 2010; Avey, Wernsing & Luthans, 2008; Youssef & Luthans, 2007). Positive psychological capital, that is, state-like (more malleable characteristics that can be developed) rather than trait-like factors (hard-wired aspects, such as ‘intelligence’ or extraversion), play a significant role in organisational positivity (Avey, Luthans & Youssef, 2010; Avey, Wernsing & Luthans, 2008; Youssef & Luthans, 2007).

Positive psychological capital is comprised of resources such as hope, efficacy, optimism, and resilience. Hope refers to the high motivational orientation to successfully achieve ones

goals; while efficacy results from the conviction that individuals possess about their ability to achieve their goals. Optimists are those who always expect ‘good things’ to happen; while resilience refers to the psychological wherewithal to bounce back from adversity (Avey, Luthans & Youssef, 2008; Avey, Wernsing & Luthans, 2008; Youssef & Luthans, 2007). These resources have been found to be positively associated with desirable attitudes, engaged employees, and organisational citizenship behaviours, as well as job satisfaction and work happiness. They are also negatively associated with organisational cynicism and turnover intentions (Avey, Luthans & Youssef, 2008; Avey, Wernsing & Luthans, 2008; Youssef & Luthans, 2007).

Perhaps then, those employees at the City who continue to persevere in the face of obstacles are relatively well-equipped in terms of the psychological capital to forge ahead. It certainly seems that there are factors that drive their motivation, which appear worthy of closer attention. Vuyo’s sentiments echoed those of Tessa. The following line from Vuyo’s interview is weighty in its sheer simplicity, *“I motivate myself to be happy all the time when I come to work.”*

**Simi:**                    **So what can you tell me about the way forward for you in the City?**

Vuyo:                    You know, I have a personal mission here. This is my job. I always say that I could have been a lawyer in the private sector earning a lot of money. I decided to serve the public in South Africa. I motivate myself to be happy all the time when I come to work. My role is to always provide the best services to my clients, the citizens of Johannesburg, and at the level where I am, I can’t say ‘I don’t know’ in providing solutions to my clients, even when I am not able to resolve a query, the reference must be given to the client so that they can get help. I must always assist, I must refer them to correct channels. My role is to maintain the reputation of the organisation at the highest level. So that is what I, as Vuyo, will always strive to maintain. Regardless of the problems the City has, and the challenges we have, we always need to try and move forward and be the best we can be. Yes, it sometimes takes real motivation and courage with all the problems we see in the

City, but if we all threw our hands in the air and gave up, where would we be? That is not the way to be. South Africa needs us. WE KEEP GOING. (Smiles broadly).

**(Extract 36)**

Elements of hope, efficacy, optimism and resilience are so overt in Vuyo's extract. His continuous commitment to providing the best service to his customers is moving, his heartfelt statement, "*Yes, it sometimes takes real motivation and courage with all the problems we see in the City, but if we all threw our hands in the air and gave up, where would we be? That is not the way to be. South Africa needs us. WE KEEP GOING,*" is truly reflective of the remarkable psychological capital that Vuyo is able to draw from. He finished this part of the conversation with a broad smile, and in my notes I wrote, 'Vuyo's smile lit up the room'.

### **7.3 Summary of the Chapter**

In exploring the third research question of the study, namely, how participants' perceived organisational reputation has shaped their organisational identification, it was evident that the clearly negative perceived organisational reputation outcome that was expounded in the previous section has had deleterious outcomes for the participants' organisational identification with the City. Feelings of being 'silenced' by leadership; and of being part of a context that caused them to feel like they were betraying their democratic ideals and purpose has contributed to a gamut of negative emotions that appears to have compromised their organisational identification.

Furthermore, the predicament of 'overlapping memberships', where employees are concurrently employees of the City *and* citizens of the communities that they serve, created the unfortunate situation of scrutiny, feelings of judgment, and a sense of harassment in their social circles, given the widespread dissatisfaction with the service delivery provided by the City. This resulted in feelings of defensiveness, shame, embarrassment and a blow to their self-esteem.

However, it is evident that ‘overlapping memberships’ are also underpinned powerfully by the theory of dialogical selves, which traverses time and space, where multi-voiced, distributed and various aspects of the self emerge during different contexts to shape organisational identification, and hence reputation. The inner dialogue in the person and between the person, organisational life, and society makes for a multiplicity of selves engaged in constant negotiation, and provides a strong shaping influence on reputation.

It may seem like the logical conclusion then that participants’ sense of organisational identification with the City must be totally shattered due to the challenges outlined above. However, this did not seem to be entirely the case, because for some of the participants, there seemed to be a complex intermingling of both shame *and a deep* pride that bound them to the City, and engendered loyalty in them. Furthermore, their traversing of the delicate boundary between being an employee and part of the very communities that have been struggling for so long has undeniably surfaced some emotional upheaval, but also bound them in their commitment to the City’s efforts for these communities. Notably, the participants also expressed an uncompromising sense of hope, efficacy, optimism and resilience that made them ‘believe in the destination for South Africa’ and, hence they continued to fight for it.

## CHAPTER 8—CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Research on perceived organisational reputation – how employees believe others outside the organisation view them because of their association with their organisation, has never before been conducted in South Africa’s public sector. There is, in fact, a dearth of academic research on organisational reputation in the public sector, both globally and in South Africa (Carpenter & Krause, 2012; da Silva & Batista, 2007; Luoma-aho, 2007). What makes perceived organisational reputation, specifically, a powerful concept is the fact that employees are central to its conception. Employees are the very bedrock of organisational reputations (Dowling & Moran, 2012; Gray & Balmer, 1998; Helm, 2011; Shamma & Hassan, 2009) and are central to both organisational identity and image, thereby influencing reputation (outsider perceptions) significantly. The reciprocity and complex dynamism that exists amongst organisational identity, organisational image and organisational reputation is very starkly manifested in perceived organisational reputation (Brown et al., 2006; Davies et al., 2004; Pruzan, 2001; Whetten & Mackey, 2002). This is because the inside-outside dynamic that characterises the relationship between employees of an organisation and those outside it (e.g. customers) is one that is in constant motion, each shaping the other, either positively or negatively, to cultivate the reputation of an organisation.

While employees shape outsiders’ perceptions of the organisation, they are also *concurrently shaped by* public impressions of the organisation, and it is within this dialectic that employees’ sense of organisational identification is either bolstered or blemished. Being part of a successful and highly-regarded organisation cultivates a strong sense of organisational identification for employees, which is further enhanced by high levels of pride and self-worth (Dutton et al., 1994; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Helm, 2011). However, the converse is also true



and when employees are part of a poorly regarded organisation, they experience disengagement from the organisation (Dutton et al., 1994; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Helm, 2011).

South Africa's current 'crisis of legitimacy' brings its reputation to the forefront. Government has, unfortunately, faltered in significant ways since the advent of democracy in the country – in the early years of democracy, political stability through NPM reforms was top of mind, and little focus was placed on the historical 'baggage' inherited from the dysfunctional, apartheid-era administration (Chipkin, 2016; Chipkin & Meny-Gibert, 2012; Louw, 2012). Furthermore, the new government underestimated the complexities that would be encountered in the transformation of the abhorrent public sector that it inherited. It thus adopted a short-term view that has had serious repercussions for its reputation (Kroukamp, 2002; Mpehle, 2012; Nengwekhulu, 2009; Theletsane, 2013).

The following factors significantly undermine trust in government in South Africa – the poor delivery of basic services by local government, which contributes to massive disillusionment amongst citizens and violent service delivery protests (du Plessis, 2008; Koma, 2010; Kroukamp, 2008); systemic skills shortages in the public service that have resulted in compromised service delivery and maladministration (Chelechele, 2009; Franks, 2015; Kroukamp, 2002); and endemic levels of corruption that threaten to destroy our very institutions of state (Franks, 2015; Kroukamp, 2008; Sindane, 2009). Today, 22 years into democracy, a political maelstrom is underway, with allegations of state capture, imminent threats of an economic downgrade, a loss of faith in the ruling ANC party, and brutal in-fighting within and amongst key political institutions in the country. The trust of citizens in South Africa has certainly been jeopardised.

As employees are the bedrock of organisational reputations, the reputation of South Africa's public sector hinges on its employees. They are critical in ensuring that government receives sustained, positive attention to its transformative and developmental role. This is not without its challenges, however, as legacy factors and democratic transition issues have ravaged the internal cultures of government departments, resulting in grave dysfunction in the form of nepotism, ineffective management, poor teamwork, poor recruitment and talent management measures, suboptimal performance management and political interference in the running of certain departments (Naidoo, 2012; Nengwekhulu, 2009; Sindane, 2008).

I have argued that, given the context outlined above, public sector employees' perceived organisational reputation must certainly be negatively affected. This would have consequences then for their organisational identification, which could be compromised in light of the negative outside perceptions due to the severely diminished stature of their organisation. Given the reciprocity of reputation, these feelings of discontent would seep outside the boundaries of the organisation, shaping outsiders' perceptions of the organisation negatively – and so the vicious cycle would continue.

The study posed the following questions:

- What are the emerging and recurring themes across narratives in public sector employees' accounts of their perceived organisational reputation?
- What are the specific stories that emerge from public sector employees' accounts of their perceived organisational reputation as the 'voices' within each narrative are explored?
- How has public sector employees' perceived organisational reputation shaped their organisational identification?

In this study, narrative was foregrounded. The data was collected using in-depth and open-ended narrative interviews, and analysed using the ‘listening procedures’ of the Relational Method. This method was originally developed by Brown, Gilligan and their colleagues (Brown et al., 1991; Brown & Gilligan, 1991) to study women’s narratives of moral conflict. It was highly fitting in the context of this study given the ‘loaded’ public sector legacy outlined in this study, where matters of social reform, democracy, justice, and finding a ‘voice’ and equality in South Africa constantly come to the fore. The sample comprised 15 participants. Of these, ten (66.7%) were females and the remaining five (33.3%) were males. The sample comprised three African males, three African females, one White male, five White females, one Indian male and two Indian females. The narrative interviews and the Relational Method’s analytic process provided a compelling lens on the personal, organisational and societal content shared by the participants (Hawkins & Saleem, 2012).

### **8.1 Summary and Conclusions about Research Question 1**

The first research question concerned what the emerging and recurring themes across participants’ narratives were with regard to their perceived organisational reputation. It is important to premise the response to this question by noting that *all* of the participants categorically expressed a negative perceived organisational reputation. They believed that people outside the organisation viewed them extremely poorly, and they were very highly sensitive to labels like “useless” and “lazy” that were used to ‘stigmatise’ them. Generally, public opinions of their perceived incompetence, poor work ethic and a lack of credibility and honesty caused distress for them.

The result of this negative perceived organisational reputation is that these labels seem to have fed into the psyche of the organisation. This study argues that employees are the bedrock of

organisational reputations – they are the most influential stakeholders when it comes to determining how positively or negatively an organisation's reputation is viewed. As the academic literature purports, a negative perceived organisational reputation has consequences for employees' level of identification with the organisation, personal identities and self-worth as outsider perceptions mould employees' sense of how they view themselves and their affiliation with their organisation (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Helm, 2011; Helm, 2013; Riordan et al., 1997).

The implication for this study is that, due to a negative perceived organisational reputation, the participants seemed to be experiencing depression, stress, embarrassment, discomfort, lowered enthusiasm levels, and disassociation from the organisation, which compromises organisational identification and hence has a negative impact on organisational performance (Dutton et al., 1994; Helm, 2013; Mishra, 2013; Pruzan, 2001; Riordan et al., 1997).

Furthermore, the golden thread of the 'reciprocity of reputation' that has surfaced throughout this study, and in relation to perceived organisational reputation, is noteworthy. As organisational reputations are essentially co-created by those inside the organisation and those outside the organisation, there is a dynamic, fluid interplay between the perceptions of employees and the perceptions of the public. This means that employees shape outside perceptions, but are also concurrently shaped by them (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Dutton et al., 1994; Helm, 2011), and therefore a perilous co-creation of negative perceptions and experiences is galvanized into action.

In light of this, the implication for this study is that employees and citizens of the City are both involved in this process of co-creating a negative reputation for the City, and a 'self-

fulfilling prophecy' of sorts is underway, perpetuating a cycle of destructive misalignment between employees and stakeholders outside, and contributing to an already 'loaded' public sector legacy in South Africa.

In response to the research question about the emerging and recurring themes across participants' narratives with regard to their perceived organisational reputation, it was evident that there were certain key 'themes' that emerged that clearly accounted for the participants' negative perceived organisational reputation. The implication for this study then, is that these recurring themes provide the rationale for their negative perceived organisational reputation.

The first recurring theme related to the perceived leadership void at the City. The participants experienced an environment that was un conducive to performance as there is a lack of leadership ethos, direction, support, and accountability. They indicated that this stemmed from the erosion of ethics, values and behaviours, which are necessary for a strong leadership foundation for the City. This manifested itself in a feeling of deep inertia and disappointment in the participants. It is important to bear in mind that this theme is symptomatic of a broader leadership crisis facing our country, where questions about the gravitas, credibility and integrity of our government leaders are constantly being asked.

The second recurring theme spoke to the massive fragmentation in the City, which can lead to an impaired sense of accountability. The participants perceived that there was fragmentation and deep misalignments amongst departments in the City that contributed to a lack of ownership and accountability, and a compromised sense of purpose, as well as difficulty functioning optimally in their roles. Furthermore, in-fighting amongst departments and a 'blame-game' exacerbated the fragmentation. As outlined in Section 6.2.1.2, local government, being at the forefront of service delivery, and the tier that people experience directly in their daily lives,

must give focused and systematic attention to its coordination, integration, and coherence challenges or its service delivery ambitions will be continuously scuppered.

The third recurring theme was that the organisation seemed to suffer from a lack of team cohesion and peer support. As leadership has reportedly failed to provide the necessary credibility, direction, and discipline in the organisation, the participants felt that they had to contend with nepotistic hires who did not display the required competence, as well as poor attitudes from their colleagues, who failed to demonstrate accountability. The type of brand ambassadorship and professionalism that the Batho Pele principles endorse does not seem to have taken root in this context, and the participants were distressed at having to ‘carry’ others who were ill-equipped to perform their duties. Furthermore, customers experience the lack of professionalism directly, and hence the dysfunctional behavioural routines of employees feed into the perceptions of customers; and customers’ negativity feeds back into the employee base – therefore, a dismal reputation is co-created in the City. Moreover, the lack of team cohesion and peer support could point to a massive lack of organisational identification across the City, resulting in negative impacts on performance, cooperative behaviours, organisational citizenship and extra-role behaviours.

The fourth recurring theme related to how the participants perceived corruption to have seized the City. There was much discomfort, vulnerability, unease and tension raised as a result of explanations of how corrupt practices at the City have gripped the City in the form of nepotism, tender malpractices, unethical labour broking practices, the abuse of ratepayers’ money, and the perception that politicians were at the very centre of this corruption. It is a plague that has also gripped our nation, as illuminated in Section 3.5.3.

The fifth recurring theme pertained to the nemesis of the billing crisis in the City. The participants felt besieged and harassed by the constant scrutiny and public attention that they received regarding citizens' billing problems, some queries having spanned years and causing immense frustration amongst employees and citizens alike. The City's denial of a billing crisis and the perceived lack of a leadership will to address these long-standing concerns have created a mounting sense of disillusionment.

The sixth recurring theme spoke to the political interference that is experienced in the running of departments. According to the participants, the unrealistic promises that are made to the public for electioneering purposes, as well as the nepotistic appointments that are dictated by politicians, have compromised employees' delivery 'on the ground' and has made them feel angry, vulnerable, and helpless. Furthermore, the service delivery protests that often occur in response to local government's perceived neglect of their responsibility to communities can be viewed as one direct result of the hollow promises made for the purposes of winning political favour amongst these communities.

The seventh and final recurring theme was about the City's branding of being a 'World Class African City'. It was viewed by the participants as a contentious piece of marketing that cultivated a deep sense of cynicism amongst them. As leadership in the organisation seemed to largely lack credibility, and were the very endorsers of this brand, it is understandable that employees would have difficulty connecting with it as it seems like a towering statement in light of all the problems that the participants had articulated. What was particularly compelling about this theme was again the reciprocity amongst organisational identity, image, and reputation – the participants' negativity about the City speaks to a bruised organisational identity and hence the branding vehicle of the 'World Class African City' is perceived as a disingenuous piece of public

marketing (image management) that has resulted in a tension between employees' experiences (identity aspects) and outsider perceptions (reputation).

A key and significant implication of these seven recurring themes for this study is that they have resulted in a range of severely negative emotions including disappointment, frustration, inertia, discomfort, vulnerability, helplessness, tension, anger, and disillusionment. The gamut of emotions is exacerbated by a compromised sense of purpose and obstacles to these employees performing optimally in their roles. These factors represent a significant threat to employees' organisational identification and sense of connectedness with the City.

Furthermore, no single theme can be viewed as a causal factor, but together, these seven themes coalesce to provide a complex, interwoven, ethically bereft landscape that employees must fight against if they wish to 'do the right thing'. The content of the themes resonate strongly with Section 3.5 regarding the challenges that the South African public sector faces, and aligns with what Chipkin and Meny-Gibert (2012) refer to as a web of "ruptures and continuities" (p. 111) in the creation of the "contemporary South African public sector (organisational culture, norms and values, for example)" (p. 111).

## **8.2 Summary and Conclusions about Research Question 2**

The second research question concerned what the participants' specific and unique narratives were with regard to their perceived organisational reputation, namely, those that 'stood out'. There were two of these. The first specific, and very astute, narrative related to one participant's theory of a perpetuating cycle existing in citizens' engagement with the City. He relayed his view that citizens have over time become defeated and apathetic in response to the lethargic 'machinery' and poor service of the City, and have therefore "*evolved*" to accommodate poor service. He believed that this was true of the old regime and was the reality



of the new regime too, and the phenomenon seemed to have been ‘handed down the generations’.

The implication of this idea of a perpetuating cycle of non-delivery on the part of the City, and the concurrent apathy manifested by citizens, is that it brings the reciprocity of reputation so elegantly to the fore. It is plausible that over the years, through a ‘loaded’ public sector legacy, negative and dissatisfied employees of the City have influenced the perceptions of customers. These customers have come to always expect poor service, and this has in turn exacerbated the negativity of employees due to customers always expecting poor service. As such, each has fed into a vicious cycle of negativity.

This insight suggests the reciprocity of reputation that the literature purports (Dutton et al., 1994; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Helm, 2011), and which I have already explicated a number of times. It seems to have found quite a tangible representation in the context of this study through this detailed thought process that the participant unpacked in his conversation with me. In so doing, he described the reciprocity of reputation, manifested in perceived organisational reputation, in all of its complex dynamism.

The second unique narrative was provided by two participants who spoke of their perception that the positive initiatives that the City was rolling out were not a focal point for citizens as they tended to focus on the City’s problems rather than the solutions that the City was providing. Hence, creative and innovative solutions are often not top of mind for citizens. However, this was probably due to the fact that in most instances, citizens expect the most basic of services, and often do not receive these, and therefore think poorly of the City.

The implication for this study is that the inertial nature of a poor reputation was raised. Inconsistent and erratic service delivery solidifies negative reputational perceptions in the mind

of the public, and it is only when an organisation performs *consistently well* that it can accelerate its reputational capital (Ang & Wight, 2009). It is quite possible that the reciprocity of reputation, where employee and customer negativity fuel each other, is contributing to a consistently poor reputation, which is very difficult to shift in the City. This is the case as reputational stickiness has resulted, and the reputation ‘resists’ being altered (Mahon & Mitnick, 2010).

### **8.3 Summary and Conclusions about Research Question 3**

The third research question concerned how participants’ perceived organisational reputation shaped their organisational identification. The results of Question 1 in Chapter 6 seem to indicate that due to a negative perceived organisational reputation, the participants seemed to be experiencing the depression, stress, embarrassment, discomfort, stress, lowered enthusiasm levels, and disassociation from the organisation that is evidence of a compromised connection to, and organisational identification with, the City. This could potentially impact organisational performance negatively (Dutton et al., 1994; Helm, 2013; Mishra, 2013; Pruzan, 2001; Riordan et al., 1997).

The idea of ‘conflicted selves’ in the City emerged as a key finding when considering how the participants’ negative perceived organisational reputation had shaped their organisational identification. The voices of participants in this study have been shaped by South Africa’s legacy and its ‘loaded’ public sector context. In this regard, the Relational Method nimbly facilitated a close examination of these different voices and how they were in harmony or discord with each other, and the relevant power dynamics at play.

Four perspectives arose that indicated how conflicted the participants were, due largely to their negative perceived organisational reputation, consequently jeopardising their organisational identification greatly.

The first conflictual situation related to the participants' feelings of being silenced and stifled by the organisation, and unable to speak their minds. It resulted in feelings of distress and anxiety, and an overt 'separateness' from the life of the organisation, one participant described it as "living in a bubble". A silenced voice denotes a sense of complete disempowerment, one participant actually mentioned that the 'silence' enabled her survival in the organisation. It is a very troubling matter to contemplate, as if one needs to remain silent in order to survive the City, which speaks to a very dark, and oppressive regime. Furthermore, in a place like local government, which should be a bastion of democracy, this is not the type of language we should be hearing. It runs completely contrary to the ideas of freedom and progressiveness, and is in fact reminiscent of the bullying tactics of the apartheid regime. To have to fight for survival in an organisation is the absolute antithesis of organisational identification.

The implication of being silenced is that employees can feel increasingly stifled, resentful and passive-aggressive, which results in a situation where the status quo is maintained because there is no impetus to voice how the culture of the City and its leadership *should* be experienced, both inside and outside the organisation. Additionally, the public may view the silence as incompetence, collusion, or a profound level of disengagement. It is certainly a perilous factor in employees' identification with the City.

The second matter was a highly emotive one, for it spoke to participants' feelings of having betrayed the democratic ideals that they espoused and struggled for, by virtue of their affiliation with the City. This is an insight that resonates palpably with the current national

discourse about ‘Saving South Africa’ and sustaining our democratic principles. The participants voiced their devastation at having been involved in the fight for democracy and an equitable public service and how they experienced feelings of having betrayed this cause. Yet, ironically, they were also placed in the role of ‘betrayers’ as being part of government, they become the protagonists in the destruction of democratic ideals. It is certainly a difficult contradiction to make sense of, and one that has definitely taken an emotional toll on the participants. While feelings of betrayal elicit feelings like sadness, disappointment, emptiness, hurt, bitterness, melancholy and defensiveness, feelings of being the ‘betrayers’ surface shame and guilt.

The implication of being caught up in the predicament of being both the ‘betrayed’ and ‘betrayers’ has certainly damaged the participants’ feelings of identification with the City, and has also had a negative impact on their sense of purpose, personal identities, self-worth, and pride. Furthermore, it is a dilemma that runs so deep as it has its roots in the apartheid struggle for freedom, which is a heavy cross for the participants to bear.

The third conflictual situation spoke to the participants’ feelings of being judged by their social circles because of their employer, the City. This finding provided a closer look at the idea of ‘overlapping memberships’ as employees are both public servants *and* members of the very communities that they serve, which is a dynamic that they must constantly navigate. ‘Overlapping memberships’ has been raised a number of times in this study, including in relation to feelings of persecution and judgment that these employees felt because of the poor impression that their peers made on the public; the psychological burdens they appeared to carry in relation to the perceived corrupt practices at the City; and also in relation to struggling, themselves, financially and socially in the very communities that they serviced.

This dynamic also resulted in a frustrating blurring of boundaries between work-life and home-life, and questions, insults, judgments, harassment and the labeling of the employees of the City were experienced very negatively and sensitively by the participants. It resulted in feelings of defensiveness, aggression, shame, embarrassment, and was a blow to their self-esteem. As clarified in the literature on perceived organisational reputation, employees use their organisational affiliation to nourish their feelings of self-worth (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Helm, 2013; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The implication of this is that it also reveals a compromised sense of the participants' organisational identification with the City because of this turbulent inside-outside dynamic.

The fourth conflictual situation seen as jeopardizing the participants' identification with the City is related to the finding above on overlapping memberships. While the previous point concerns the feelings of judgment experienced by the participants in their social circles, this one is related to the dialogical negotiations that the participants employed in traversing the boundary between *serving* the community and *being* the community. Certain choices needed to be made by the participants in their roles as 'employees' or 'community members' and they were not always easy. The notion of "I am the City, and so are you" came to the fore, for it spoke to the embeddedness of all citizens in the life of the City, regardless of whether they are employees of the City. It also raised the idea of the reciprocity of reputation yet again, and the absolute fluidity in the inside-outside dynamic. Furthermore, the notion that the City as an entity has neglected its connectedness with the people it serves surfaced, and also that it has compromised the spirit of *ubuntu* in this regard. However, what was also raised is that the City represents a microcosm of a broader reality in South Africa, and this reality is that people have abandoned community principles in the pursuit of their own selfish, individualistic goals.

The implication of this finding is that we should not take the dialogical negotiations that employees of the City must frequently undertake lightly. It results in inner turmoil for employees as they continuously navigate the delicate boundary between being part of the community and serving the community. Many of the employees of the City face the same dire challenges that the communities face in their daily lives – it is not an easy or simple contradiction to manage.

While the previous four findings lead us along the line of thinking that perceived organisational reputation has played a significant role in sullyng the organisational identity of participants, it is not an uncomplicated affair. The next two findings point to the fact that there is something that tempers what should be an obvious disassociation with the City given that the challenges are massive in both their scale and complexity.

The first of these is that feelings of pride and shame coexisted in the participants. The feelings of pride appeared to serve as a ‘differentiator’ for certain participants. They took a resolute stance in continuing to do their best in their jobs, regardless of the challenges that they confronted, and distinguished themselves from the ‘bad apples’ at the City. While these narratives still yielded the immense guilt, pain and shame of their organisational identification, there was also a steely determination underlying these conversations. There was a sense that these participants remained loyal and bound to the City, and had pride in the careers that they had built there *precisely because of these challenges*.

The second of these tempering factors relates to the strong sense of hope that continues to drive the participants’ efforts at the City. As in the previous point, the participants ‘kept going’ in the face of these obstacles. It seems that these participants remained strongly attuned to ‘possibilities’ and the destination that they wanted South Africa to reach. They also seemed to

receive a sense of self-worth and personal currency from giving to others – it affirmed them and denoted a powerful altruism in the manner in which they engaged with their work.

The implication of this finding is that it resonates with the academic literature on Positive Organisational Behaviours (POB), where positive psychological capital, in the form of hope, efficacy, optimism, and resilience, leads to positive organisational behaviours and outcomes, and mitigates dysfunctional ones, like organisational cynicism (Avey, Luthans & Youssef, 2010; Avey, Wernsing & Luthans, 2008; Youssef & Luthans, 2007). Perhaps then, certain employees of the City are better equipped in terms of this psychological capital, and it enables them to forge ahead, mitigating their organisational disassociation from the City.

#### **8.4 Unique Contribution of this Study**

The first contribution of this study is methodological in nature. This study is the first of its kind to use a narrative frame, and the analytic tools of the Voice Centred Relational Method, to study perceived organisational reputation and the idea that reputation is cultivated through an organisation being in dialogue with itself and others. As it happens, the Relational Method has never before been utilised in any study on reputation. To date, research on perceived organisational reputation has been dominated by perceptions captured on rating scales (Bartels et al., 2007; Carmeli & Freund, 2002; Carmeli, 2004; Carmeli et al., 2006; Ciftcioglu, 2010; Helm, 2011; Helm, 2013; Mishra, 2013; Smidts et al., 2001), and hence the reciprocity and dynamism of reputation has not been adequately captured.

The Relational Method is consistent with a dialogical view of the self, and I have innovated the study of perceived organisational reputation by supplementing the traditional, staid means of measuring it. More importantly, the Relational Method's attention to polyphony, voice, and the inherently social nature of the self allowed me to tap into deep, multilayered narratives

that capture a fundamental characteristic of reputation – its reciprocity, and complex inside-outside dynamic. Previous methods have failed to address and capture this reciprocity.

Furthermore, within the context of South Africa's public sector, studying perceived organisational reputation using the Relational Method has been a creative, empathetic, and meaningful way of tapping into the different voices that have shaped employees' experiences in the public sector, especially due to its rich, complex, apartheid-influenced legacy. I was therefore able to listen for those relationship and societal forces that either enabled or constrained the participants' expression of their multifaceted selves; and was also able to attend to narratives that emerged from the unbounded selves, whose individual, organisational and societal narratives intersected. In so doing, the notion of 'conflicted selves' in the City came into full view, as well as the idea of 'overlapping memberships', as employees navigate the tenuous boundary between *being* the community and *serving* the community.

A second contribution of this study is that it contributes to our understanding of the concept of perceived organisational reputation in the public sector in South Africa and its nuances, challenges, and opportunities. Perceived organisational reputation, which is a powerful concept, has never before been studied in South Africa, not in its private or public sectors. Public sector employees are vital in ensuring that government begins to develop a positive reputation; they are at the very heart of perceived organisational reputation.

A compromised sense of identification and commitment on their part thus thwarts progress. However, achieving optimal organisational identification is particularly challenging to achieve in a public sector context as 'loaded' as that of South Africa. Employees being the bedrock of organisational reputation in the public sector means that due focus must be given to



their perceived organisational reputation because it influences their organisational identification, and performance, and ultimately, the transformative and developmental agenda of South Africa.

## 8.5 Implications for Theory

The major implication of this study from a theoretical perspective is that it provides a firm footing for Bakhtin's Theory of the Dialogical Self in the study of perceived organisational reputation. Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Stakeholder Theory have been the theoretical frameworks that have traditionally been employed in studies of perceived organisational reputation, with SIT certainly dominating the academic literature. While both theoretical frameworks have their strengths, and each provides a specific and complementary lens to a dialogical one, they are inadequate for capturing the dialogical complexity and reciprocity of reputation that is inherent in perceived organisational reputation.

SIT, on the one hand, provides the answer to the question of *why employees care* about their organisational reputations, and explains why employees either bond with their organisational reputations or not (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Helm, 2013). Stakeholder Theory, on the other hand, *identifies the main actors that enable the cultivation of organisational reputations*, and is valuable in its conception that stakeholders (including employees) are very core to organisational reputations because without them, reputations would not exist. Stakeholder Theory therefore identifies the key protagonists influencing the dynamic interplay amongst identity, image and reputation.

However, like SIT, it is left lacking in the dynamism and fluidity that a dialogical conception of perceived organisational reputation harnesses as it is unable to access the richness of the various 'voices' that these stakeholders raise to create meaning systems. A dialogical theoretical framework is better equipped in this respect. A dialogical view enables a full

appreciation of the inherently social nature of the self. Multi-voiced selves enter engagements with others in an unbounded and permeable manner, hence individuals' internal voices are engaged in dialogue with various external voices within social contexts (Hermans, 2001; Hermans, Kempen & van Loon, 1992).

## **8.6 Implications for Practice**

This study has illuminated the importance of perceived organisational reputation at the City of Johannesburg due to its intricate links with organisational identification, and hence performance. The implication for the City's organisational practice is that perceived organisational reputation should be afforded due attention in strategies to optimise organisational effectiveness. Education about the construct of perceived organisational reputation should be provided to managers and employees at the City with the aim of creating an awareness and appreciation of how they influence the inside-outside dynamic, and that they are the very bedrock of their organisation's reputation. This should go beyond the typical, mundane brand-ambassador and change agent programmes that seem to prevail in local government, and that I have experienced in my work in the past in local government.

Furthermore, the reciprocity of reputation, where employees and customers are co-creators of organisational reputation, means that it may be valuable to introduce focused dialogue sessions between employees of the City and the citizens of the City in order to build constructive solutions. This idea is not without its complexities, however, given the depth of the emotions experienced by both stakeholder groups. Nonetheless, this type of collaborative practice is worthwhile to explore further. It could perhaps galvanise consistent solutions around some of the very basic service delivery challenges experienced, and incrementally build the reputational capital of the City, gradually moving it away from its current inertial, negative state.

Assistance must also be provided to those employees who are obviously grappling with the deleterious emotional experiences stemming from their negative perceived organisational reputation. Employees' experiences of depression, stress, embarrassment, lowered enthusiasm levels and disassociation from their organisation perhaps requires professional counseling as these emotions run deep and are difficult to manage without professional assistance. While there are perhaps inherent challenges in identifying who is struggling significantly with these emotional ailments, this does not negate the importance of giving this matter due consideration. As all of the participants in this study expressed this type of angst, it is probably safe to assume that it is a large-scale problem at the City.

Furthermore, leaders at the City need to be aware of, and acknowledge, the obviously quite unique and dire effects that South Africa's legacy of apartheid and current transitional tumult has had on its employees' experiences. It has resulted in 'conflicted selves' grappling with substantial issues. Honest, robust leadership is paramount to authentically unpacking the various reasons for employees' negative perceived organisational reputation – the reasons that participants raised for their negativity are, after all, not new to government.

Leadership and moral fibre are also needed to address potential threats to employees' organisational identification – their feelings of being silenced and oppressed; of having betrayed their democratic ideals in the face of the challenges they experience; the complexity arising from their 'overlapping memberships'; and the sensitivities experienced because employees feel judged and shamed by their social circles because of their organisational affiliation. Perhaps this moral fibre speaks to the idea of *Ubuntu*, which was raised in this study. It could potentially be the concept used to ignite these discussions. It would, however, be remiss of me not to note that our government institutions in South Africa are largely mistrusted by communities, and are

believed to lack this moral fibre – the participants of this study indicated that the City is no exception. Hence, there have been increasing calls for this to be addressed if we wish to ensure a positive future for the country.

## 8.7 Limitations of the Study

The participants were sourced from one local government entity, the City of Johannesburg, hence it is not possible to generalise findings to other local government entities or to provincial or national government. However, it is important to bear in mind that the purposive sampling method employed was concerned with the participants' depth of experience, rather than generalisable insights. While public sentiment and media coverage seem to attest to the similarities between the findings in this study and the broader government milieu, further research on perceived organisational reputation across government tiers is required to provide a robust assessment of the findings of this study.

The participants employed in this study provided fairly consistent views in terms of their criticism of the City, however, did not 'own' any of these issues. What this means is that to them, the City's problems were something that they themselves did not contribute to and these problems were viewed with great distaste and angst. This is possibly due to the 'like-mindedness' elicited from the sample. My initial contact base at the City was comprised of people who I knew relished their roles as public *servants* and who possessed an admirable sense of altruism that fuelled their passion for the City. I had certainly experienced their contribution in the past. While I attempted to source a heterogeneous sample comprised of different races, age-groups, genders, tenures, departments, and positions within the hierarchy of the City, these efforts may not have been completely adequate. Due to the snowballing sampling method employed, perhaps who I was referred to, and 'who grew the snowball', possessed similar

valuable characteristics. While this is a potential downside of a non-random, purposive sampling method such as this, the purpose of this study was to elicit meaning-making and in-depth experiences. However, the zeitgeist at the City at the time that the research was conducted may have also contributed to the homogenous views – as it happens, preparations were underway for the 2016 municipal elections and perhaps prevailing sentiments contributed to the views expressed. Further research using quantitative interviews and cross-sectional surveys with a larger population is thus necessary.

Furthermore, amongst these 15 participants, no notable differences or striking similarities due to race, gender or tenure were elucidated as the narratives yielded were largely homogenous – all race groups, both genders, and tenure categories seemed to converge on very similar narratives. It may be necessary for this to be broached in further studies to elucidate any nuances in this regard. As mentioned previously, large scale quantitative studies or mixed methods research that builds on this qualitative design may clarify the impact of these demographic factors.

## **8.8 Implications for Future Research**

Further research on perceived organisational reputation using a dialogical theoretical anchor should be implemented in the public sector in South Africa. This would deepen our appreciation of the challenges and opportunities that the construct provides, given the multiplicity of voices that surface in a reputational context. Further scholarly appreciation of the construct and its impacts could yield new knowledge regarding public service motivation, and serve as a means to drive commitment and performance in the public sector in South Africa.

While *Ubuntu* leadership principles have found their way into government discourse, especially with regard to Batho Pele (People First) principles, it certainly has not gained the

impetus required for it to address public sector ills. It is perhaps useful to return to ‘first principles’ with regard to *ubuntu* and to ‘get back to basics’ in this regard. South Africa’s government, as explicated in this thesis, is largely facing a crisis of leadership, legitimacy and morality, and reigniting energy around *ubuntu* is a potential mitigating strategy in this regard.

Additionally, Positive Organisational Behaviours (POB) like hope, efficacy, optimism and resilience (Avey, Luthans & Youssef, 2010; Avey, Wernsing & Luthans, 2008; Youssef & Luthans, 2007) are worthy of further investigation in the public sector. They may indeed temper negative perceived organisational reputation, and optimise employees’ organisational identification and performance in the public sector in South Africa. This could solidify their role as lodestars of their reputations, and may be a necessary and important next research step.

## **8.9 Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter provided a summary and conclusions related to the three research questions posited in this study. It also covered the unique contribution of the study, its implications for both theory and practice, the limitations of the study, and finally implications for future research.

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## Appendix 1: Interview Schedule

### Interview Guidelines

**Date:**

**Participant's Details:**

**Gender:**

**Age:**

**Position/Functional Area:**

**Highest Educational Standard Attained:**

**Experience in years and months:**

**Framing question:** Organisational reputation has emerged as a critical aspect in the functioning and competitiveness of organisations in the corporate world. However, very little research has been conducted on reputation in the public sector, and on public sector employees' understanding and experiences of reputation. Can you please narrate a story or incident where you felt the reputation of your organisation (as a public sector employee) was at stake?

- Please describe the incident in detail, highlighting what was happening (internally and/or externally to the organisation), who was involved (individuals, units, communities, or other departments); your own involvement in this incident/narrative, what you did or did not do.
- Probe further with a series of questions . *Examples: What happened? When did this happen? Who was involved? What was at stake for the people involved? How did this make you feel? What was the outcome?*

[WITH THE INCIDENT OR NARRATIVE AS THE BACKGROUND, ELICIT THE FOLLOWING FROM THE NARRATORS]:

- *What do you consider to be the role of the senior leadership in maintaining the organisation's reputation?*
- *What do you consider to be the role of the employees in maintaining the organisation's reputation?*
- *What do you consider to be the community's role in maintaining the organisation's reputation?*
- *What do you consider your role to be?*
- *(Drawing from this experience): What does organisational reputation mean to you? How would you define organisational reputation?*

## Appendix 2: Summary Notes

Name: Bheki

Age: 40

Gender: Male

Position: Junior Manager

Date: 20 Mar 2015

### Striking issues in the contact

- 'Living like Europeans' – we have lost our connectedness to each other (*Ubuntu*)
- Culture of 'deployment' – a vicious cycle
- Tension between wanting to 'do the right thing' and being undermined
- Certain agitation, resolute about his convictions, frustrated
- Plagued by his concerns

### Information obtained:

- Everywhere in the public sector, there is no clear indication of who is supposed to do what. It is a 'culture of deployment'. One is not allowed to question this.
- Reputation is at stake because unqualified people are brought in.
- Tender irregularities take place – 'fraud and corruption is killing the organisation'.
- Politicians act as labour brokers – in contravention of the LRA.
- Leaders need to be educated and developed so that they can represent themselves adequately.

### Areas for further clarification:

- Does he carry these concerns with him all the time? E.g. when he goes home?
- If so, what is the impact of this?

## Appendix 3: Sample Worksheet for ‘Listening 1’

### Purpose of ‘Listening 1’:

- To identify main events and protagonists in the story
- To understand the story as it was experienced by the narrator
- To identify recurrent images, metaphors and contradictions
- Researcher’s personal reflection

### Narrator: Bheki, 40 year old Junior Manager (Support Services)

### Background:

Since he began working in the City 10 years ago, he has experienced non-adherence to policies and procedures in the City. There are tender irregularities and a lack of adherence to policies, and political interference in the running of the City. “Fraud and corruption are killing the organisation”. It feels like a sense of community has been lost and that “we are living separately”, and not attuned to each other’s needs.

### Striking metaphor:

“The voters vote for mafias”

### Images & Feelings:

- “They smash all the good things we try to do” – feeling of having efforts completely undermined and destroyed.
- Something ‘violent’ in the imagery.

### Tensions & Contradictions:

- A methodical, analytical person having to bear witness to mass irregularities and non-adherence to policies and procedures
- Conflict between his ideals and the City’s way of operating

### My personal reflections;

- It’s sad to see how hard people in the City work and how they have their ideals and goals obliterated.
- Am I romanticising ‘Ubuntu’?



## Appendix 4: Sample Worksheet for ‘Listening 2’

### Purpose of ‘Listening 2’:

- To identify the ‘speaking subject’ or ‘I’ in the story
- To identify tensions between the voice of the person (‘I’) and the voice/s of the group or others (‘We’)
- To look for emerging conceptions of the self

**Narrator: Bheki, 40 year old Junior Manager (Support Services)**

### The ‘I’

- A methodical, analytical person having to bear witness to mass irregularities and non-adherence to policies and procedures – conflicted
- Repressed by the dark veil of corruption and non-delivery that is perpetuated by politicians and senior leaders in the organisation
- Disappointment that a sense of community and Ubuntu seems to be compromised for him given all that he is seeing in the City (‘We are living like Europeans’)

### The ‘We’

- ‘I’ conflicted with ‘We’ – the ‘City’ (politicians and senior managers) who put their personal interests above the needs of the citizens of the country
- Feels troubled by the lack of connection to the community that they are supposed to be serving

### Emerging sense of self

- A conflicted self, trying to do the right thing and spread the right messages around accountability but perpetually hamstrung by mass irregularities
- A conflicted self who feels disappointed that the values of Ubuntu seem to have been eroded

## Appendix 5: Example of ‘Listening Matrix’ for a Participant

**Narrator: Jane, 47 year old Senior Manager (Support Services), Pilot participant**

<b>EXAMPLE OF A ‘LISTENING MATRIX’</b>			
<b>Reading 1: The Plot</b>	<b>Reading 2: The Speaking Subject</b>	<b>Reading 3: The Self-in-Relation</b>	<b>Reading 4: The Socio-Cultural Context</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jane is a senior manager in the City struggling to deliver a quality service to her internal clients. This is due to massive misalignments internally and a lack of focused leadership. She feels defeated and tired, and this has caused her stress and high blood pressure. She is proud of her accomplishments in the City and has climbed up the ranks through hard work, but at this stage is left feeling guilty, battleworn and helpless.</li> </ul>	<p><u><i>Tension</i></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Between the Self (‘I’) and the City (‘We’) – caught up between trying to do ‘the right thing’ in terms of service delivery and the politics of the City.</li> <li>Proud yet ashamed.</li> </ul> <p><u><i>Sense of Self</i></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A fragmented self, trying to identify with the City and making it ‘World Class’, but struggles with the barriers imposed by ‘poor leadership’.</li> <li>Defines herself as a person <i>with morals and without power</i> fighting a City <i>without morals and with power</i>.</li> <li>‘Good versus Evil battle’</li> </ul>	<p><u><i>Relationship with internal customers</i></u></p> <p><i>Feelings:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feels like she is not serving them and hence compromising her service to society – experiences guilt, fatigue, helplessness.</li> </ul> <p><u><i>Relationship with her own department</i></u></p> <p><i>Feelings:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feels a sense of massive fragmentation and misalignment – fatigue, helplessness.</li> </ul> <p><u><i>Relationship with Society/external clients</i></u> (e.g. people in informal settlements)</p> <p><i>Feelings:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feels like she is not serving them – guilt, fatigue, helplessness.</li> </ul> <p><u><i>Relationship with Politicians</i></u></p> <p><i>Feelings:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feels a ‘force’ that undermines service delivery – anger, guilt, fatigue, helplessness.</li> </ul> <p><u><i>Relationship with The City and its Leaders</i></u></p> <p><i>Feelings:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feels a dark, convoluted force that undermines her efforts – anger, guilt, fatigue, helplessness. ‘They are not willing to bow down to anyone’.</li> <li>Overall feelings of negativity, helplessness and paralysis.</li> </ul>	<p><u><i>Institution of Work</i></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Traditional work values, strong work ethic – she has thus been ‘derailed’ by the way the City operates.</li> </ul> <p><u><i>Service to Society in context of democratic, post-apartheid SA</i></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Compromised by her inability to render a quality service.</li> </ul>

## Appendix 6: Consent Form



### Participant Information Sheet

#### Invitation

You are being asked to take part in my PhD research study on your experiences as a public sector employee in local government. While much research has been conducted on organisational reputation in the corporate world, very little work has been done on reputation in the public sector. The aim of the research is to understand public sector employees' understanding and experiences of reputation in local government. I would like to listen to, and understand, the stories that you are willing to share with me in this regard.

The research is being supervised by Professor Nhlanhla Mkhize from the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, and has been approved by the University's Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

#### The process

In this study, you will be asked to 'tell your story' in a face-to-face meeting with me, which will be approximately 1-2 hours in duration. There is no 'right or wrong' story, I am interested in experiences you have had in your role as a public servant. I will be completely respectful and open to whatever you wish to share. The discussion will be audio-recorded so that I can transcribe the content later, however, you can choose not to have it audio-recorded if you wish.

Permission to audio-record (please tick and initial above the block):

Yes

No

Please note the following:

- Only my supervisor and I will have access to the audio content and any notes from the session with you, and all content will be stored safely and confidentially.
- Your participation in this study is completely confidential – your name and other personally identifiable information will not be released. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity. **No one will link any information back to you.**
- I will ensure that I validate your 'story' with you after our meeting, to ensure that you are comfortable with the accuracy of the content. This will require us to meet again, at a time and place convenient for you.
- Please understand that your participation is voluntary and you are not being forced to take part in this study. However, your participation will be greatly appreciated.
- If you decide not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any point, there will be no consequences for you whatsoever, and you will not be required to justify your decision.
- The results from this study will be documented in a thesis, and may be provided in journal articles and conference presentations.
- We also hope that what we learn about your experiences will enable us to make useful recommendations to leaders in the public sector.

## INFORMED CONSENT FORM



(\* Copy to be provided to research participant)

By signing below, you agree that: (1) you have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet; (2) questions about your participation in this study have been answered satisfactorily; and (3) you are taking part in this research study voluntarily (without coercion).

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's signature

**Contact details of researcher:**

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**Contact details of research supervisor:**

Professor Nhlanhla Mkhize

Tel number: 031 260 2006


Email address: [Mkhize@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Mkhize@ukzn.ac.za)

**Contact details of Humanities & Social Sciences Ethics Committee**

Ms. Phumelele Ximba

Tel number: 031 260 3587/2381 Email address: [ximbap@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ximbap@ukzn.ac.za)

## Appendix 7: Approval from UKZN's Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee



**UNIVERSITY OF  
KWAZULU-NATAL**  
INYUVESI  
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

23 December 2014

Ms Simi Ramgoolam 962098691  
School of Applied Human Sciences – Psychology  
Howard College Campus

Protocol reference number: HSS/1669/014D  
Project title: "Perceived organisational reputation in South Africa's public sector: Employees' narrative accounts"

Dear Ms Ramgoolam

**Expedited Approval**

In response to your application dated 18 December 2014, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

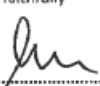
Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

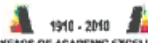
  
 .....  
**Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)**

/px

cc Supervisor: Professor Nhlanhla Mkhize  
cc Academic Leader Research: Dr D McCracken  
cc School Administrator: Ms Ausie Luthuli

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